

THE MAIDEN AND THE HAND-
MAIDEN.

A TALE OF HOME-LIFE IN NEW-ENGLAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "SUSY L—'S DIARY."

CHAPTER I.

On a certain day—and it was twenty-four years ago this day—a young girl and her handmaiden were married, both by the same clergyman, both in one hour, both in one room. The young girl was tall and delicately framed, and as white as a lily. She wore white satin and blonde, and orange flowers. The handmaiden was short and round, with rosy cheeks, with black and shining hair and eyes. She wore white lawn and bobinet-lace; and had her hair in heavy braids, with white and red roses, broken in the yard, on one side. A middle-aged gentleman, who was in black—save his white waistcoat and neck-cloth—and who had a courtly bearing, gave them both away. He was the father of one bride, the master, so called, of the other. He gave one bride to a young man of polished address, of winning sweetness, both in the tones of his voice and in the glance of his eye; who had commingled with his elegance a certain impulsiveness and irregularity in his words and movements, as if somewhere in his head or soul he needed more ballast. His name was Cyrus Cunningham. He sits at this moment that I am writing, in a far corner of the room, and reads the morning papers. He is fifty now; is still an elegant man; and he is my father.

He, the father of one bride, the master, so-called of the other, gave the handmaiden to Alfred Stone. He wore a common suit of blue broad-cloth; and had a grave, manly way of carrying himself, as if he would see well to himself, to *her*, to whatever belonged or would thereafter belong to them.

They, Alfred Stone and Matilda Mason, were the children of poor parents; and when very young, were adopted into my mother's family, where they remained until their marriage. Mr. Stone purchased his farm, which in a few years came to be the pleasantest and most valuable in the neighborhood, and Mrs. Stone furnished their house, which ere long was teeming with plenty, all of the wages and gifts put into their hands by my grandfather Barton. Grandpapa purchased the house and beautiful grounds of the attorney whose successor papa was to be at Piscataquog, and gave the whole to mamma for her dowry. He gave her money besides, with which to fit the whole up suitably.

Thus the newly married couples settled down for life, side by side: Mr. Stone in his blue frock to till his grounds, papa in his rich black cloths to administer the laws. Still were they equals from the beginning; for if papa brought education and natural versatility and generosity to his profession, so did Mr. Stone bring stores of agricultural knowledge, experience and great enthusiasm to his farming life. Mr. Stone had indeed the advantage of poor papa in this; he came of a vigorous, hard-working race. He had himself been innured to a busy life in the good air and sunshine, so that he had nerves and sinews of iron; and a principle and will, which kept him collect-

ed and firm, whatever went on around him. On the other hand, great wealth had been in papa's family for several generations, and luxury and ease. Grandpapa met some heavy losses, that brought him down a little from the high estate of his fathers; still he was a wealthy man, and papa had an indolent and pampered boyhood. It was not until his father died without a will, leaving a widow, three sons and three daughters, that papa began to look upon the world as a field in which he too was to work with his fellows.

Well, years passed, and one fair-haired little girl was growing up to womanhood in the home of the Stones; in the home of my parents there were two; fairer, a little more delicate, both of them, than the little Charlotte, but not so strong, so elastic and happy. She was always well, always bounding. They, poor things, were often glad to sit and rest in the easy chairs; often had heavy eyes, quick pulses, cheeks pale and flushed by turns, tokens of sore throat, or ear-ache, or head-ache or fever, or two or three of these ailments together. Year by year they grew stronger, however; for, although their soiled frocks, sun-burnt faces and wild manner, often shocked their mamma, she knew what was good for them, and let them go here and there with the little Charlotte for their guide and keeper. They found out all the shady places, and dressed and undressed their dolls in them; made burdock cots and carpets for them, and coverlets of the broad elecampane leaves.

At length they—that is, Charlotte Stone, sister Sylvia and myself—were young women. Manchester sprang up over the river as if by magic, and the value of Mr. Stone's farm was quadrupled; but papa was going down hill slowly all the while. He hated accounts; he, moreover, even after he had been many times cheated, went on trusting in every man's word, and thus had loss upon loss; first by the failure of the Lovelaces, whose security he was to a large amount; then by purchasing of Harrison Phelps valuable landed property already mortgaged to another, and by other delinquent or positively fraudulent proceedings on the part of those he esteemed and trusted. He was fretted and disheartened by his losses, and especially by the injustice that occasioned them. To repair the misfortunes, if possible, and no longer having indulgence for Morrill and Patterson and others, since the Lovelaces, Phelps and others had shown no justice towards him, he instituted a suit at law against the first-named gentleman, for the recovery of a large tract of land lying partly on the Uncanoonuc, and partly on the plain below, and which was once the property of his father. From a wilderness, the fathers of those farmers and the farmers themselves had brought it to blossom as the rose, and to bear fruit and grain in abundance. They claimed their farms on the ground of long undisturbed possession: and the law favored them. They kept their lands; and papa came out of the prosecution with an empty purse, a deeply mortgaged estate, and a soul still more embittered, and at a loss.

"My luck!" he said, when each reverse fell; and we would as lief have heard a dirge.

If, when a man were defrauded out of a few hundreds, or a few thousands, if his pockets were

lightened a little, and his business movements impeded more or less, if he might all the time keep the same cordial, loving and calm heart, it would matter little as far as he came in. And thus it is sometimes with those who weigh deeds and words with the far-sighted Christian philosophy which takes all their springs and issues into its estimates: who trust still in God, in the good, the force of their own souls. But oftener, darkness comes upon the wronged man, so that he sees nothing clearly, neither his own duties, nor the palliating circumstances attending his brother's injustice toward him. A palsy gets hold of him. Life and hope go almost out of him. He neither knows nor cares what he does, and so he puts his lips to the wine-cup. Then it is better! Then, *Io triumphe*, how bright, how dazingly clear is the life that a minute before was so dull, so heavy! *Io triumphe*; he will taste the wine cup again and again. And so he does. So papa did at length. He drank more and more; neglected his business more and more; and but for the busy services of his student, Garland, his affairs must have been ruined utterly. Mr. Stone also held him back by his great love for him. Mrs. Stone kept hopeful eyes on his face; and when he would have complained of his lot, took him and us all over across the gardens to her sitting-room that was always so shady and cool in summer, so warm, so genial in winter, and set the dishes that we all loved, and especially the dishes that papa loved, before us; or she brought the dishes in to us, the steam shut in by the snowy napkins; and sat and ate and chatted merrily with us. Charlotte sat with us often; but ate little. She wrangled constantly with papa; often laughing heartily, often with tears in her eyes; but always with the loving, earnest heart that *could* not let him go on suffering and yielding to the tempter.

Papa was never brought down one inch in his social position by his habit. In all political, church and social movements, people came to him and said:

"What is it best to do about this, Esquire Cunningham?"

Hair-cloth, velvet, gilding and marble faded and lost their polish all through our house; but the best people still came to us and we went to them. Papa kept his animation while they remained; but when they were gone, sent troubled glances here and there through the room. He sat perhaps and brooded an hour with his head bent over a book, but never once turning a leaf, unless Charlotte came in and laid her hand on his shoulder and let him hear her cheerful voice. There was, by-the-by, a time when her voice was no longer cheerful as of yore; when, if she spoke of courage and patience, and manly trust, it was with tearful agitation, as if at the same time that she cried peace! courage! to my father, she cried it also to her own suffering heart. It was about the time of Sylvia's betrothal to Horace Babcock. This we remarked at the time. We remarked also that she had nothing to say of this same betrothal; and that she no longer came in when it was likely that she would meet Babcock there. At last, with tears and choking grief, she bade us all good-by, one dull Autumn day, and went to spend several months with friends in the south

part of the State. Papa fretted about her going, for his own sake. We missed the dear girl, who, as we now felt more than ever, had always been a good angel in our midst. But chiefly we were uneasy on her account, until her letters, taking a character of strong vivacity, made us sure that the cloud was passing. She came back with delicately rounded cheeks, in which the pretty dimples set back whenever she spoke, and especially whenever she smiled. She had new dignity and grace in all her words and ways, and the readiest, warmest sympathies for all our cares, all our pleasures, and for the cares and pleasures of every mortal that came near her. "Perfect through suffering—perfect through suffering"—this was what we thought as often as we met the deep friendly glance, or felt the soft hand, or marked the gentle bearing.

CHAPTER II.

Sylvia and Babcock had been betrothed a twelvemonth. In one year, he said, at the time of their betrothal, he would have his affairs well in train, and then he would claim her for his own. And when once she was his, when her father was his father, he would lift him out of all his difficulties, redeem all the mortgages on his property, would find a rich husband for me—for instance, old Esquire Wilson, a bachelor, and the richest man in Manchester—would, would, in short, there were few things he would not do for us when the year came round. He rubbed his hands, and was an inch taller than his wont, when he talked about it. He had so little tact, his mind was so essentially vulgar compared with Sylvia's, I fear we all despised him a little, or all but Sylvia, and deserved that his assiduities should cool, his promises die away, as the year was drawing to its close. He had been building a beautiful house near ours. He began and went on for some time with a dozen workmen, and taking counsel of papa and Sylvia at every step. By-and-by, as the year was coming round, he dismissed one workman after another, so that soon only a solitary hammer was to be heard now and then. Papa took quick steps about the premises in those days, and when Babcock looked for praises of his mahogany hand-rails along the stair-case, said—

"Yes, yes, it is very well; it is a fine house; but, Babcock, your workman there is a drone. Your house will never be done, at this rate."

Babcock received suggestions of this sort rather stiffly. He knew the cause of papa's haste; knew that unless several hundreds came into papa's hands, before that day two months, he must sell all these to pay off mortgages. And if it now and then occurred to him that Sylvia had a share in papa's interested motives, it cannot be reckoned a proof of any wonderful acumen on his part; for, although very friendly and considerate towards him, very submissive to all his opinions and wishes, she was yet still, when he was present, and seemed never to know what to say to him; whereas to Garland, who looked to papa's concerns and to ours, and was like a son and brother in the house, she poured out her thoughts, her best thoughts and her purest thoughts, as if they were two children together.

Papa was concerned about this. Garland was the best fellow there was on the earth. He wished Babcock were half as good, as manly and as talented. Else he wished Garland were richer, a great deal richer, and then things might go on between him and Sylvia. He would be the last one to hinder them. Mamma listened with flushed cheeks and a kindling eye. She praised Garland in a few, soft, slow words, but said nothing of Babcock.

"Margaret," said papa, turning to me, and looking me searchingly in the face, "what do you think? you say so little about this business, you should think a great deal. In one word, do you think Sylvia loves Babcock? or does she love Garland?"

"She only thinks of Garland as a brother, papa," I answered, confidently; and it was true. It was true, moreover, that she loved him better than she could have loved forty Babcocks. Of this I was sure, but I said nothing of it to papa. "I asked her the other day," resumed I, "if she was sure that she really loved Babcock well enough to be his wife. She told me that she supposed she did; she knew nothing to the contrary."

"Knew nothing to the contrary!" repeated papa, laughing heartily. "What a baby she is! Well, at any rate, it sounds as though she could manage to live without him. She isn't likely to have her heart broken by his delays; that's a comfort, isn't it, my wife Helen?"

He kissed his wife Helen on her still fair and beautiful forehead, took me in his arm, and led me out into the yard, where the roses were blooming and the birds singing, called mamma out to hear how her favorite bird was "pouring its throat" up in the elm, then bowed and smiled to us many times, and was gone.

CHAPTER III.

One evening, Sylvia and Garland stood together at a west window, looking out upon the glorious sunset sky. They had been a long time silent, and I had been looking at them from my seat on the sofa, and thinking that there could be nowhere else so well-matched, so beautiful a pair, when Garland said, in the rich tones peculiar to him in speaking to Sylvia—

"If this might last, Sylvia."

She held her eyes on the sunset clouds, and said, with a sweet smile—

"Perhaps they will come again to-morrow."

"I mean," said Garland, "if it *all* might last. I care less for the pleasant sky than—in short, Sylvia, in short, Margaret," turning and bowing to me a little, with a smile, and, beyond this, with a look of pain, "I was thinking that if it might *all* last, the sunset out there, and if I might keep my place here by Sylvia! But, to-morrow, Babcock will be here, and then my place is in the office, or anywhere—no matter where—anywhere but here."

"You shall sit here by me, then," said I, laying my hand on the cushion by my side. He came and sat down by me. Sylvia kept her face at the pane a moment, and then went out, saying, in an indistinct way, something about Charlotte.

"If I could believe that he would make her happy!" said Garland, with his eyes on the door where Sylvia had disappeared. "If he were good enough for her!"

"She thinks he is very good; she praises his goodness to papa not a little," said I, taking up my sewing.

"His goodness to your father!" said Garland, with a bitter voice. "He will relieve your father the day Sylvia will marry him; not a day, not a minute earlier; not if your father is on the rack every moment until then! Ha! I would despise myself for such stupidity. If I had a tithe of his wealth! But I haven't. I need not be thinking of this. I will just go to the office, and do the only thing that is left for me—work, work, work."

"And remember as you work, my brother Garland, that you are, after all, a happier man than he is, or ever can be, because you have that in your brain and heart worth ten thousand fortunes like his."

"I will try to believe it. Good night, good Margaret." He bowed and was gone. He did not come in again for many days.

The next morning, Esquire Wilson called on papa, at his office, and proposed in a regular way for my hand; enumerating, as his recommendations, his houses in the town, his farms in the country—saying, of course, not a word about how they came mostly by extortions upon his loans—and his large income as law-practitioner.

Papa came in with quick steps, and laid the matter before me, hoping, as I saw, that I would take the man for the sake of the money. But I was aghast at the bare thought.

"No, indeed, papa!" said I. "Not if he were made of gold—that is, if he were capable, at the same time, of being the disagreeable, unprincipled man that he is."

"Then there is the end of it!" said papa, speaking with a sternness very unusual to him; for, although often petulant, he was never tyrannical, never really unkind. "But I tell you, Margaret," added he, "we are not the ones to throw away chances like this, because people who are no better than Wilson is, have taken it into their heads to speak of him always as an unprincipled man. They would give their daughters to him any of them; and especially if they were in my position. For, I tell you, Margaret, if you throw away your chance, you throw away Sylvia's too, I have not one doubt. I can see that Babcock dislikes the incumbrances she will bring, and very naturally too, as Heaven knows. But if you marry Wilson, all will be easy. I dreaded speaking of it to you," resumed papa, after a pause, finding that I did not speak; "but something must be done, and that soon; for I am on the rack continually. I don't attend to anything. If it were not for that Garland, even the office would not stand in its place."

He walked the room; I sat still, ready to sink and die.

"I shall say 'no' to him, then?" asked papa, taking up his hat to go.

I could not speak. I could only weep—not for the utter poverty that was coming; for I had always the feeling that I could live in a garret and

be happy, if papa would keep his strength, if we would love one another and have patience; and especially if we would have less pride, so that we might use our hands and brains in the way of bringing comforts into our home. I believed that troubles, difficulties, of whatever shape, paralyse us, or nerve us with energy and clearness, according as they leave us more or less freedom to struggle and combat with them; or, rather as they leave us more or less free to go forward in our work, putting the troubles, the difficulties far behind us. Ours, in the character we allowed them to take, bound us brains, hands and feet, and held us to wait for relief to come in with another; and thus they were altogether hateful to be endured.

"I shall say 'no,'" papa repeated.

"Yes, papa, you must," said I, going to him, and laying a hand on each shoulder. "I will—I would die for you, willingly, willingly! if this would make you happy. But I can never marry him! Let him go, papa. Let Babcock go; let this house go, if it must. We can live without it. We will teach; Sylvia will teach music; I will teach the languages. Our friends will all help us to pupils. Sylvia and I have talked this over, dear papa, and we have said to each other that we want nothing better."

"Nonsense!" moving away from me, and preparing to go. "You and Sylvia are two babies. You have read of Fortunatus' purse, Aladin's lamp, and of the fairies who scatter roses and pearls in the path of the good children who do great things for their parents. So you think Sylvia has only to touch the piano keys patiently a few times, and you to run over your *amos vel amours*, to make us richer than any Jews. I am going now to see Babcock. Have coffee for dinner; no boiled-over stuff. Let it be strong enough to bear up a heater."

He came late to dinner, and then ate nothing, only drinking coffee immoderately. And when he came home at night, and for many nights, he made us, oh, so hopelessly miserable! He had never drank so deeply as he did that week and the next. And see how it was at the end of that fortnight, when he stopped and looked about him on his affairs. At home, mamma's cheeks and her beautiful, soft eyes were sunken, as if she had just came out of a raging fever. Sylvia and I had eaten enough to keep the breath from going quite out of us, and were so spiritless; and Sylvia had such large, mournful eyes, such wax-like paleness! We kept ourselves as cheerful as possible by day for poor, dear mamma's sake; but how dark were our nights! what hopeless tears we shed! yet, in a still way, each of us, so that the other might not hear and be distressed on their account. Abroad, papa had lost two valuable cases. The depositors were papa's good friends; they sincerely regretted withdrawing them; but there was no other way.

Babcock had not once called in that fortnight, either at the office or house. But he had written to Sylvia, professing unabated friendship, regard, and so on; but dwelling chiefly on the hardness of the times; on his own difficulties, in common with others, in meeting his obligations of trade so promptly as to avoid a crash. He had given

the subject long and serious thought, he said; and had come to the conclusion, that, if she were willing, they would defer their union—at least, until business took a more favorable turn. In that way his house could remain as it was at present. He would also be saved other contingent expenses, by which he meant, as she would understand, furnishing house, &c., &c. He broke the affair to her in writing, he said, because he could not bring himself to do it in any other way.

In conclusion, he would repeat his assurances of undiminished regard. She was beautiful, he said, she was good; much too good and beautiful for him, as he had always known. She must think kindly of him. They would wait and see how he prospered; and meanwhile he would subscribe himself hers, as ever.

She did think kindly of him. She shed many tears; but in her heart was no bitterness.

"The toad!" said Charlotte, spitting the words out of her mouth, as it were, when the circumstances came to her ear. "But you can't reckon it a loss, dear. Gentle as you are, you could never have been happy with such an arbitrary creature. You don't wish him back, Sylvia?"

"No, it isn't that," said the bird-like voice. "I am thankful to be free, whenever I think it all over; and I am strong, and like a new creature. But again, before I have time to reason with myself, there comes a sudden, crushing sense of desertion and wrong; that quite overpowers me for a minute. It is only a minute, and then I am strong again. If papa can get along!"

Garland worked early and late in papa's affairs; and through his hands fees came in. He was not often at the house: and when he came, it was only for a few minutes, to say some pleasant, cordial things to mamma, sitting close by her side. He had little to say to Sylvia, in those days; but I often saw lingering, and not unhappy glances going in her direction. She was very busy always with her sewing, and kept downcast eyes; but I saw that she looked well-pleased to have him there.

CHAPTER IV.

"Helen! girls!" said papa one day as he came in and looked around upon our parlor furniture, "I've advertised this house and all there is in it, for sale at auction—if not previously disposed of, of course—on the fifteenth of next month, September."

By the way, papa was himself again. He seemed stronger, every way, and calmer, than we had ever seen him; so that we had trust in him; still his sententious announcement made us quite out of breath.

"Or, all but so much of the best," resumed papa, "as it will take to furnish the bird-house on my Lincoln farm. Pick out what you like for this. Only let it be of the best. I have a fancy to see how a bird-house will look rigged out with carpets, piano and pictures, and so on."

"Do you mean what you say!" asked mamma, with questioning eyes on his face.

"Certainly I do! I have never seen the place; but I wrote to the postmaster of Lincoln to en-

quire about it. He is an obliging man. He took my letter to a Mr. Harson, whose farm joins mine; and he wrote me a good thee-and-thou letter, giving me all the particulars that I need. The farm lies a part of it on the sides of the mountains, he says, but most of it is in the narrow strips of interval land running along the branch—as they call it up there. It is one of the head streams of the Pemmigiwasset. There is a good barn, he says. The bird-house is of logs with three rooms on the ground, and a loft. This story agrees exactly with that of the man I bought it of. I doubted his word, because, with most men, whether saints or sinners, the falsehood that helps them to sell a farm, or an ox, is strictly canonical. The sinners are just as merry-hearted after it, and the saints so-called make just as long prayers. A fact, my wife, Helen," seeing that mamma shook her head. "The Quaker I can trust. All Quakers, everywhere, can be trusted; for they have consciences stronger than all the other faculties and senses. I am attracted that way, by knowing that the only neighbor there is a Quaker. I have a presentiment that the gospel-like 'thee' and 'thou' is the only man I shall have near me, in his speech and his deeds, will make a Christian of me."

"And so you would move away from us, as if we were Arabs, or Hindoos, to be near that Quaker!" said Charlotte in reproachful tones. She had come in with her father, in the midst of papa's story.

"I would move away from the wine-cellars here, and in Manchester," said papa, with hope and strength dying out of his eyes.

"Let me see to that," said Mr. Stone.

"And let me see to that," said others who came to us; and they went from papa to the prosecuting committees. But papa was fully decided what he would do. He would go forth from the old scenes to the new, from the old life to the new life far away from all temptation, so he said to the dear ones who would hold him back. They were grieved; many of them wept for us. We wept for ourselves; but we wanted to go for papa's sake. He was so dear to us in that day of his renunciation and high resolves! We would have gone anywhere on earth with him, and counted it a blessed thing to go.

CHAPTER V.

"Clap on your bonnet and shawl and ride home with me this morning, that's a good girl," said a bustling little body, in a clean, light gingham dress, cape and sun-bonnet. She was heaping a great dish with the raspberries she would give us for our preserves.

She had been a domestic in our house for several years before her marriage. Now she was the wife of Mr. Berry, a prosperous farmer at Lake Massabesic. She came into the town to do her trading; and often rode over to our village to bring us the different kinds of berries in their seasons, and balls of golden butter, pieces out of the freshly cut cheese and bottles of cream. She came oftener and oftener with her gifts, as year after year we declined in our prosperity. That day she brought a large market-basket full of delicacies.

"Bring another dish, dear," she kept saying, as she took out one thing after another. "Another dish, Sylvia, dear—I brought you a dozen eggs to go with the cream and maple sugar, Mrs. Cunningham. Our family is so small; only two of us, you know. We can't begin to eat all the eggs our hens lay. There they are; not one broken. Margaret, you'll go with me, I know. I will have some of the little hot biscuit you love so well, with eggs and cream in them, at every meal; and plums and cream; there is no end to the plums and cream you shall have. I've got a bucket of white sugar on purpose. I've got a deep custard, and two brown loaves are in the oven baking, and the smallest one will come smoking to the table for dinner."

I looked to my parents and Sylvia. They too urged me to go, and our dog Beppo, who understood a little that was going on, began springing about me, as if he too would go with Mrs. Berry and taste her loaf of corn-meal.

"Beppo shall go," said the kind woman, patting his shaggy head. "I've got the very dish he ate his bread and milk in when he was over there before. He shall go over and have some more."

Beppo gave thanks by jumping to her head almost, kissing her hand, and giving a few joyful yelps.

As for myself, I was accustomed to say in those days, that it mattered little what food was provided for the stomach, if it was only simple and wholesome; but that the aliment of the soul should be plentifully, albeit, carefully supplied. But I found that I rejoiced not a little over the cream and egg biscuit, the deep custard and the steaming brown loaf. I felt light and airy as a bird, as, followed by Sylvia, I ran to my chamber to slip on an afternoon dress. Only I wished that Sylvia were going, for we hardly knew how to live apart a day.

"But I will stay with our parents," replied Sylvia, as I sighed the wish. "There, now you look fresh as a rose. Don't fall into any love adventures over there, Meggy. 'Tis so near the lake, and there is no knowing what hero may be staying there at the Massabesic House. But don't fall in love. You and I will have nothing more to do with lovers and betrothals. We will live for each other and for our parents."

I wonder if my sister Sylvia really had presentiments of the pleasant little adventure I would meet at the lake. She said she had. If she had, I wonder if she really never had similar ones before! She said she never had! But I presume she had forgotten: or at any rate, I doubt if the affair had sufficient importance to give it place beforehand, in the shape of a presentiment, in any one's brain. Sylvia did not doubt it in the least. The hot loaf, the mealy baked potatoes and savory meats, the deep custard, and all the little dishes, such as pickles, butter, apple-butter, tomato-sauce, cheese—for Mrs. Berry could never get enough upon her table when we were there—the berry hunt along the inside of the stone walls, where the bushes were borne to the turf by the abundance of pulpy fruit; the supper afterwards, where everything was, oh, so good; partly because it was at Mrs. Berry's table, and partly because the long walk in the fields had given me such greediness;

let me skip these and go on to the time when I went out at sunset to stroll alone with Beppo. We went through the orchard, Beppo springing about me one moment, and the next scrambling along the path before me; we crossed a stile into a pasture, where moss-covered rocks, huge and little, were in every direction. I sat down on one of these. It had a shape as if it were made for a lounge of the wood-deities, and was gracefully embowered by a clump of birches growing close beside it. I would make a vase for Mrs. Berry in the morning, I thought, and began gathering the many-colored mosses beside me for this purpose. I was not near the lake; but I could see it shining here and there through the trees. Gorgeous clouds were in the west. These also were half-hidden by the slightly undulating branches of the intervening tree-tops. Dark knots of hazles were here and there; and here and there were grand old trees, gnarled and seamed by centuries. I looked them over and deciphered the seams, as if they had been hieroglyphics. It was sad work for me; especially when the whip-poor-wills, that one no where hears on every hand as one does at the lake, began to sing. My home, my parents, so weary now in the middle of their journey, and my young sister, how my heart yearned over them, and prayed that as the earthly goods went from them, the heavenly might come. I thought of the uncertain future, and felt a cold, sick dread creeping into my heart. I lost my strength; I wished with my whole heart that the time had come when God would take us all together to His rest.

But I would arouse myself, I thought. I would go back to the house and see how far Mrs. Berry's cheerful face would re-assure me; and to this end I began gathering the mosses into my handkerchief.

Beppo had been off chasing a squirrel; but now he stood demurely at my side; and when I put my hand out to gather my moss, slipped his silky head under it for a caress.

"Poor Beppo!" sighed I, stroking his head. "'Tis a poor, uncomfortable world, isn't it, Beppo?"

Beppo wagged a lively dissent. This did me a little good; I trusted a little in Beppo; and was praising him heartily, when I heard a step near me in the cow-path. I did not turn round; but looked after my bonnet, which I had laid on the rock behind me. It was gone; and I knew that Beppo had carried it off, for he had been accustomed from a puppy to do such things.

"Beppo, Beppo, where is my bonnet? Go and get it."

"Pardon me, ma'am."

I looked round now at the sound of the voice, and saw a man of thirty, or thereabouts; a quiet looking man, fit for a part in a much finer incident than this I have to relate. He bowed a little as I sprang to my feet, letting all my moss fall to the ground; and had a very grave, respectful bearing withal, that instantly quieted me.

"You were enquiring for your bonnet; I found it back there beside the path. Your mischievous dog. Byron—Byron? Is that his name?"

"Beppo, sir."

"Ah, yes. Well, I presume Beppo ran away with it. He looks like a rogueish fellow."

"Yes, indeed he is. Where is the bonnet, sir?"

"I hung it on a limb. I will bring it."

"No, sir, don't let me trouble you. Tell me where it is, and I will bring it."

He answered by smiling a little, by putting out his hand, signifying that I was to remain where I was, and by starting himself to get my bonnet.

"You are a bad dog!" said I to Beppo. But he took it for so much praise, and snapped at the moss which I had began picking up again, taking it out of my hand, out of my handkerchief, and behaving every way like a crazy dog. Looking out the path, he saw the strange gentleman, who was returning with my bonnet in his hand. Now, Beppo ordinarily waited to be formally introduced to strangers, and was strictly decorous. In this instance, he knew the bonnet, of course, and started swiftly along the path to see to that. He jumped at the strings; he barked at them; he settled down with his nose thrust forward, as if he were arranging it to go over the gentleman's head. The gentleman laughed aloud and heartily.

"He is a fine fellow," said he, giving me my bonnet, and at the same moment stooping to stroke Beppo's head.

"He don't behave very well, this evening," replied I, turning to pick up the rest of my moss. I should never have got my moss together if he hadn't taken it into his head to go and see to my bonnet. "Go away, Beppo!" for he was again springing into my mosses.

"Let me help you," said the stranger, still laughing outright at the dog's graceful pranks. I stood back a little, and hugged Beppo close to keep him out of mischief. Meanwhile, the stranger dexterously gathered the moss into my handkerchief, saying, at the same time, without looking up from his work, "I am afraid you are not strict enough with your dog. I have one of the Newfoundland breed, and he obeys me like a child."

"You would find a dog of this breed less tractable, sir. Besides, we keep Beppo for a plaything, and are quite willing to be plagued a little by him. I will take the mosses. Thank you for helping me."

He bowed to the thanks; but, when I would have taken the mosses, said—

"Not if you are going to the house that I see through the orchard. My own path lies that way."

So we walked on slowly, side by side; and Beppo trotted before us, grave now as a magistrate.

"I like that dog of yours," remarked my companion, after we had taken a few steps in silence. He withdrew his eyes, as he spoke, from Beppo to me. I bowed a little in reply.

"He looks like a contented, happy sort of dog," added he, with his eyes again on Beppo. "He don't believe all his mistress tells him of the world he lives in, probably." Again he looked at me, and a quiet smile lighted up his fine features.

"I don't understand you—altogether, sir," an-

swered I. But I think my heightened color revealed to him that I understood in part.

"I think I heard his mistress saying to him that this is but a poor, uncomfortable world. Did I not?"

I blushed still deeper; for his smile brightened and brightened; and thought I—

"He takes me, no doubt, for one of those silly damsels who doat on moonlight, and such things; who go long rambles with the last novel in their hands; or, worse still, with Byron; and who sigh and weep like the rain, and find fault with the world, and with their lot, without knowing why. But if I *were* all this," I thought further, "he has no right to be laughing at me."

"Well, and if you did—" I replied, aloud, speaking gravely.

"If I did, and if Beppo did, we would both like to put in a plea for this same world. It is certainly a very calm and beautiful world, to-night."

"Yes, to-night; and here alone with the trees. But there is enough that is uncomfortable in the world, even if you and Beppo feel none of it."

We were near the stile; and, at this moment, we saw that Mr. Berry was already there, letting it down for us to pass out. He knew my companion, it appeared. He said—

"Good evening, Mr. Woodbury! good evening!" and put out his bony hand, adding, "This is our friend, Margaret Cunningham, Mr. Woodbury."

Mr. Woodbury, in a few polite words, expressed pleasure at the introduction. I bowed, blushed again—although I am sure I don't know why; that is, why I blushed again; and then, finding that the gentlemen were inclined to stop, as they went along, to taste the fruit under one tree and another, and to talk of Baldwins and Pippins and Golden Pippins, I bowed to them, and hastened to the house. I was in the right time, Mrs. Berry said, and so I was; for there stood the row of bright tin pails full of the foam-covered new milk, and Mrs. Berry, with a glass in her hand, ready to strain some out for me. A full basin already waited on the floor for Beppo.

We had been some time seated in the parlor, when we heard the voices approaching. They came slowly. They halted awhile on the smooth lawn before the door; and, when Mr. Woodbury started away, Mr. Berry kept along with him, and they still went halting and talking until they reached the road. There they parted, and Mr. Berry returned to the house. He began joking me a little, but I put a serious, honest face—a face that corresponded exactly with my feelings—upon the subject, and then he was ready to answer his wife's questions, and to go beyond them.

"His name is Woodbury, Luther Woodbury. You know, 'Gusta, I've brought letters and papers over for him, since he's been at Mr. Olsted's. He come up for his health," again turning to me. "He had got all run down with slow fever. He had his horse along in the cars, and goes galloping off, like a general, somewhere every day. He knows more than anybody that ever I see. And it is a good kind of knowledge, too, that he don't grudge to anybody, any more than God does His rain and His dew. I somehow

always feel that it has done me good, if I hear him say ever so little. He's about well now, and is going home in a day or two."

"Where is his home?" asked Mrs. Berry, at the same time, that, with a smile in her face, she gently removed his hat from his head. "You see I can't break him of wearing his hat in the parlor, yet, Margaret. It looked so odd to me, at first, because your father never wore his a minute in the house, you know."

"I forget," said he, his good-natured look lingering on the doorway, where she had disappeared. "Our folks were old-fashioned people. My father always had his hat on in the house, and we boys did the same. But I try to leave it off now, because she"—pointing with his thumb back to the kitchen, where we could hear his wife stepping nimbly about and singing—"because there ain't one thing she *can* do to make me comfortable, and to help me along in getting property together, that she don't do, and without ever fretting, either; and this is the best of it."

"Where did you say he belongs?" again asked Mrs. Berry, re-appearing at the parlor door.

"I don't know, I'm sure, for certain. But in Cambridge, Charlestown, or some of them towns near Boston."

"Did he ask you anything about Margaret?" asked Mrs. Berry, laughing.

"No, he didn't. I couldn't help thinking, though, that he'd like to get another peep at her. He kept looking at the windows, as if he'd like to find something he couldn't. But he's a great deal too much of a gentleman to ask questions about any such a thing."

"Some way, Margaret, I thought about you, the other day, when he was telling me about this Mr. Woodbury," said Mrs. Berry, speaking in hearty tones. "I don't know what made me, I'm sure. But I guess it means something. I guess you'd better keep these." I sat at a table, looking my mosses over. "You had better make a vase for yourself out of them. We'll go out to-morrow, and get some more for my vase."

"No, Mrs. Berry," replied I, throwing the mosses a little from me. But I honestly confess I had been thinking the same thing—that I had better keep them. The vase made of them would keep a pleasant memory fresh for me; would be well worth having about, when I became an old, solitary lady. For marriage was not for me, I reflected. I had said to my own heart, and to Sylvia, that I would live for my parents while they lived. I had vapid thoughts of what I would do beyond. If Sylvia married—as her exceeding great beauty and attractiveness made me believe she would, in spite of the twin resolution of my own—I would love her children, and keep them a great deal near me. Birds, contented and happy birds, and rare plants, should be in each of my windows. Mementoes and wonderful things should be in my cabinet. Without my doors, doves, ducks and pet-lambs, should hasten to meet me when I came in sight, should take their meals out of my hand and love me. I would have garden resources; and among them should be flowers and strawberry and asparagus beds, from which I would gather beauties and dainties for my own table, and especially for the table of

those who had no spot of God's earth on which to raise the like. And the vase of mosses should always be near me, and I would go out every day, and gather fresh flowers to fill it. Thus I would decline. And, before I was very old, I would go to my parents, and to my Heavenly Parent in the other world, I hoped. And I hoped that then there would here and there be gentle looks of sorrowing; here and there one who would say—

"How I miss Margaret; I miss her more and more every day."

CHAPTER VI.

Would I not like to walk out to the lake? I had not been near it since I came, Mrs. Berry said, the next morning, when we were preparing to go out.

No. I would rather go into the woods, where the larks were singing. I wanted to find delicate wild-flowers to put into our vase when it was made.

"Just like you, Margaret," said she, laughing a little, but, at the same time, looking a little disappointed. "The truth is, I wanted you and Mr. Woodbury to meet again, some way. But you always have the most becoming way of doing things. I won't find a bit of fault with you."

There were never such rich mosses as we found that day, nor such delicate flowers. The birds never before sang so divinely, and the very things Mrs. Berry wanted for the beer she would make after we got home, were there, on our right hand and on our left. When we came out of the woods into the road, there was Mr. Berry, just going home from his field. There was never anything so lucky, Mrs. Berry thought. Then we could all go home together, and have dinner as soon as we were there, even if it was not quite noon. We would all be hungry enough to make the pudding and beans taste good, she would warrant that.

"There he is, Margaret!" said she, suddenly breaking off in the midst of her congratulations. "There is Mr. Woodbury, on horseback, coming step and step, reading a newspaper. He's been over to the city, of course. I'm glad he's coming! downright glad!"

The little woman was in quite a fluster. So was Beppo. He ran back to meet him, frisked about the horse, sprang up to the extended hand, until, after having made a few paces, the rider dismounted, threw the bridle back on the neck of his horse, and caressed the dog without stint. Then they came up with us, the noble horse walking behind, with a mien and step as if he loved his master, and were proud of him. But Beppo kept up such a capering as to throw our meeting quite into confusion, and mix laughter with everything that was said.

At length we proceeded regularly homeward, Mr. Woodbury and myself having the outside of either side of the road. Mrs. Berry kept up a strong chat with the gentlemen across the way; but I did not often speak; in the first place, because I was not ordinarily a talker; and, in the second place, because as often as I did speak, if it were only to Mrs. Berry, a head was bent for-

ward, over the other side, and a pair of very cheerful, very penetrating eyes were directed to my face, as if to understand perfectly what I would say, and my manner of saying it. Seeing this, disconcerted me; and I left off speaking altogether, until Mr. Berry looked over, and said—

"Where's Margaret? Margaret, why don't you talk?"

Mrs. Berry saved me the difficulty of answering.

"Oh, Margaret is no chatterbox like me, you know, Berry. Berry laughs at me," she added, speaking to Mr. Woodbury. "He calls me 'an everlasting talker,' and he says it is because I am a woman. But he can't say that all women are everlasting talkers. He can't say that Mrs. Cunningham and Margaret and Sylvia don't know how to keep still, as well as how to talk, in the very best way. I tell him that, sometimes."

"He can't say that Miss Margaret Cunningham don't know how to keep still. I can vouch for that," replied Mr. Woodbury, looking over to me with a smile. Just then he espied a tuft of wild lupines growing close to the roadside. He plucked the flowers, and brought them to me.

"Now let me hear you speak," said he, offering them.

"Thank you, sir."

"You are right welcome."

His horse had followed him, and now walked with grand steps behind us. The master looked back and spoke to him.

"You see, Miss Cunningham, that I must be a good master. You see how much better my horse behaves than your dog Beppo does."

Beppo was in the edge of the wood, trying to drag a dead branch from beneath its covering of dried leaves, and making tearing work of it.

"You say you like my dog Beppo, however," I replied.

"Yes I do—I like these blue flowers, too, that you have in your hand. I like this day! this place!" sending his eyes abroad upon the fine landscape that opened before us, and into which glimpses of the lake came. Mr. Berry began relating to his wife the progress that his corn and potatoes, and pumpkins, and divers kinds of rare squashes, were making. Mr. Woodbury and I, therefore, talked by ourselves; and were not once done, until the time came to separate at the foot-path leading up to Mr. Berry's door.

"I go home to-morrow," said he, speaking to us all together. "And I hope we shall meet again." He was breaking a harebell from the bunch in my hand.

"Miss Cunningham, I hope I shall sometime, in some place, have the pleasure of meeting you again." He bowed, gave Beppo's head a stroke or two, mounted his horse, and was gone.

I wanted those mosses, and the wild-flowers; especially the lupines. But I would have left them out of regard to Mrs. Berry's raillery, if she had not brought them fresh from the cellar just as we were ready to go.

CHAPTER VII.

Uncle Leonard, who was mamma's only brother, came up to see us before we left Piscataquog. He was a clergyman of Roxbury, Massa-

chusetts, and one of the best men I ever knew. He was as kind as an angel to us all, and especially to poor, self-reproaching papa. But when our friends and neighbors said to him—"Help us to keep them, Mr. Barton—join your voice with ours in persuading them to stay;" he smiled on them and on us, and let it be seen that he was willing to have us go. I heard him saying to papa, when the two were talking earnestly together—

"You are doing a noble thing, Cyrus. I, too, see your redemption up there where there will be no tempting sights and flavors, and where the air and labor will be so invigorating."

He would have taken me home with him. He brought petitions from aunt and the girls to this effect. But papa turned tearful, loving glances to me and to mamma, and said—

"She is our main stay. We can't spare her now. Sylvia is a dear girl; but she is not our oldest, our first-born; we can spare her better."

Sylvia went to Roxbury. It was difficult for her to go; she went at last with many tears, and declaring that we would see her at the door of our bird-house at Lincoln, in less than a month. On the same day, our furniture was sent forward; and we went to Mr. Stone's to stay a few days, that we might be sure of finding our things at Lincoln when we reached that place. They were happy days; for our friends came and went, and let us see clearly how dear we were to them; how we were even dearer then in our adversity, than we had been in our prosperity.

It was balm, thinking and talking of those days, in the long autumn and winter months that followed. We had, besides, numerous other pleasures. The Harsons were like good angels of peace to us. A love passing the love of brothers was soon between Mr. Harson and papa. They worked, rode, and strolled over their grounds together; and sat in the long evenings with clear eyes on each other's face, and talked of what they had been reading, at odd intervals of leisure through the day, in the "Tribune," in the "Reviews" (for papa had several of these sent by Garland and uncle Leonard,) in the lectures, essays, and historical works they read, one after another. Political action at home, congressional action at Washington, diplomatic action abroad—they sifted it all in the clear light of religion and common sense; rejecting a vast amount of it as poor and unworthy, but without bitterness; and looking forward to the fulness of times, when there would be less hindrance in the way of a consistent and enlightened course, both in public and in private life. We all—that is mamma and Mrs. Harson, Hetty Harson and I—had part in the reading and the discussion; so that, in the midst of our dearth of what we call "privileges," we were gratefully conscious of going forward. Hetty had a voice of bird-like compass and flexibility. I taught her many fine songs, and how to sing them as I played. I taught her French, moreover, and crochet-work. We made cottages, and crosses and vases together, besides doing plain and fine sewing with our mammas, and plain and fine cooking. No birds in any bird-house were ever busier than we in ours.

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We had letters often from our friends at Roxbury and Piscataquog.

"Don't let the bears eat you, if they are inclined, when they grow hungry this fall," wrote uncle Leonard's second daughter, the lively, ever amiable Helen Louise. "Don't freeze next winter, even if you see the mercury in your thermometer doing it, as they say you will. Heu! how I dread it for you! I am glad your bird-house is so tight. I am glad you have got a stove in every room, and flannels and furs, and brave warm hearts. And I am thankful as can be that the good Harsons surround you so with kindnesses. These are the best of anything for keeping one warm. God bless you. God bless dear uncle and aunt. God bless us all! Thus, with a light pen, but a loving, sincere heart, prays your

"HELEN LOUISE."

CHAPTER VIII.

Spring came, and the sound of the birds, of the leaping waterfalls, and the soft beauty of the many-colored buds.

Papa was very busy. He made an addition to our house—of logs without, like the rest; but within neatly plastered and painted. By the way, the old rooms had been snugly fitted up, plastered and painted, in the fall. We wrote to our friends at Roxbury what we were doing—and, in a few days, the stage-driver left a huge deal-box at our gate; and on taking it in and opening it, we found wall paper for all the rooms, busts of several statesmen and poets, besides books and tropical fruits and letters.

They were all coming to Lincoln on the very first pleasant day of the mountain-going season, the letters said. Helen Louise wrote—"There now, my best cousin Margaret, let me tell you something. I can't keep it any longer, and shan't. Let them surprise uncle and aunt with it, when we come, if they will; but I shall tell you all about it. I am the more beset to do it, because they have all been as sly with me as with you. They tried to keep it from me; and put their heads so knowingly together. They said I wasn't steady enough to help any body keep a secret. I think we are all, very often, what people make us by their suspicions or trusts, don't you? I mean to remember this, and trust everybody; and if they are mischievous, it will make them harmless as the doves are, perhaps. But the secret! I guess at it all, Margaret dear, or nearly all; but I am sure that I guess right. Sylvia, then, has found a lover here, the very prince of all lovers and men; and his name is Luther Woodbury. He's the handsomest man and the best man in Roxbury; and I myself have been thinking what a nice husband he would make for me, by-and-by, when I am old enough. But I don't mind giving it up. I would take out a piece of my cheek for her, any time. They sit together and talk, and talk and keep their eyes on each other's face as only lovers do. He waits on her everywhere; they are going into Boston to-night to hear Whipple lecture. He is to go up with us, of course. How happy we shall all be! 'It claps wings to me!' thinking of it. There was never so good a time as we will have,—this I know. And *this* I know, too,

that I love you all, and the Harsons, dearly, and am,
Your good-for-nothing,

HELEN LOUISE."

The birds and all the sounds of the Spring mocked me after this. The light that had been round about me on the mountains, on the sky, on the fresh young foliage, was suddenly turned to darkness. My heart felt as if it were becoming iron; and I had every hour struggles as if for life with it, chiefly to dislodge therefrom the coldness towards Sylvia, that went creeping through and through my being. I could not bear to feel the coldness and live. Therefore did I reason with myself, and pray and strive continually for the pure, unselfish heart, that would forget its own cares and burdens, in its gladness for others and in its labors for them. I brought myself to walk a great deal in the cool, bracing winds; I worked vigorously about the house, turning every corner of it into elegance and neatness, and as the season advanced, laid borders in the yard and sowed the whole multitude of seeds we had sent to us along with perennial roots and shrubs, by our friends at Piscataquog. Papa made the enclosure. It was a lattice-work of unwrought spruce and firs. Papa brought trees and planted them before the house; and wild grape-vines in such abundance, that when July came, the bird-house was as green as a bower. Perennials bloomed along the walks and in the middle of the plots, and half-open rose-buds of many colors, and green leaves passed through the lattice.

One day, about this time, the stage-coach stopped at our gate, and Garland alighted, and came with quick feet to meet us all on our way to him. There was never such rejoicing. But when it was over a little, I saw—why, I saw that he had been improving every hour. One does not often see so fine a head and eye, so easy and dignified a carriage. But his aspect was grave and collected, as if he had been exerting a mastery over himself, as if he was still at all times exerting it. The child-like vivacity was gone; but, thank Heaven, the child-like affection and earnestness were there, making us feel how good it was to have him once more sitting in our midst, opening his heart to us. He had his eyes often on Sylvia's instrument, I saw; and then his head was bent and averted a little, as if in pain.

Cream and eggs and the delicious maple sugar abounded in our supper; but he ate little, and when papa pressed him, he said with moistened eyes:—

"It is meat and drink to me being with you once more, my good friend. In the morning I shall be ravenous enough."

Neither could we any of us eat. We could just look on each other and talk. This was his great piece of news—Babcock had offered himself to Charlotte Stone and been rejected.

Garland had learned Sylvia's engagement through Julia Leavitt, a young lady at Manchester, to whom cousin Rufus was betrothed. He communicated this to me as we took a little walk by ourselves in the soft starlight.

"I am sorry! I am sorry!" said I, with a choking voice and eyes full of tears. "I am as sorry as you can be, for what has happened at Roxbury; because you are like a brother to me, like a son

to my parents. And I really thought that she loved you."

He pressed my hand close, but shook his head in reply.

"But we will let it pass, Garland; and trust that it is best as it is, and keep our strength. My parents as yet know nothing of it," added I, lowering my voice, for we were at our gate; "although they soon will."

Garland had friends with him, who went forward to put up at the next hotel for the night. He was to join them by the morrow's stage. We expected Sylvia that day; papa and mamma urged and entreated him to wait. He stooped to stroke Beppo's head as he again plead his promise to his friends. He did not agree implicitly to stop when he came back. He would come up next winter and go deer-hunting, and stay a week with us, if he did not stop on his return. He would bring new books; he would have a perfect appetite then for our good dishes! No cub among the mountains would be half so hungry as he!

Ah, that would be good, we all said. We exulted already over the wintry time that would be made so genial by his presence there with us. Still papa and mamma must again come back to Sylvia; and the enthusiasm all died out of Garland's eyes at the name. They did not perceive it, and so it was Sylvia, Sylvia to the last. Sylvia would probably come that very day. If she did not, she would certainly come within the week. And she would regret it so much if she did not see him then, or on his way back. Sylvia must see him; he must see Sylvia.

He wrung our hands, and had the reddest of all faces on going.

CHAPTER IX.

Well, they came in a day or two. Sylvia held first one and then the other of us in her arms; and all the while had great shining tears running down her cheeks.

"Miss Cunningham!" said Mr. Woodbury, when at last we came together. And his was a warm grasp. It was a clear, beaming face into which I just glanced, as we met. I trembled and could hardly breathe. I had little command over my brain or my tongue; and thus whatever I said had better have been left unsaid, as I was painfully conscious the moment my words had passed my lips.

"It has been a warm, wretched day," remarked I, to Mr. Woodbury.

He stood before me with his eyes on my face, as if he were expecting me to say something.

"Can it be that you think so?" with surprised tones.

I did not look up fairly; but I saw, as it were, a halo of good humor about his face.

"Yes, it has been so warm!" I replied, blushing.

"We had a glorious breeze as we rode. I thought it the best day God ever made."

I did not answer; for others came in with praises of the day. But—"Yes!" thought I. "This is the way he rebukes me, if I find fault with the world or the day. Because he is at his ease, with not one thing in the world to trouble him; because he chooses among all the daughters of men which he will have for his bride; and has chosen the

loveliest and the best, and had her by his side all day in the open breeze; because of all this, the world is such a dear good world!—the day has been, oh, such a glorious day!”

I sighed heavily and turned to Sylvia. “Sylvia, do you know who has been here?”

“Yes,” answered the sweet, dove-like voice. “Mamma has just been telling me.”

The color came to her cheeks, and her eyes were bent to the floor. When she raised them, they sought Mr. Woodbury’s immediately, I noticed.

There were such vigorous stir and bustle, and joy all through the house and yard and garden, that there was no room for me and my stupidity. I took numberless turns, feeling that if I might be alone a little time, I could then look composedly about me and find my old equanimity. But I could nowhere reach a nook where I could be alone a moment. Sylvia or Woodbury, or some one followed me, to say numberless things to me there, else to bring me back to the company. It was the worse for me, that they all saw that something was going wrong with me; that they all plied me with attentions and questions, and sympathies, and especially that whenever attention, or question, or sympathy came, Mr. Woodbury looked at me, as if to see in what mood I would receive it.

“He will see in what a miserable humor I am,” thought I, more than once, “and be glad that he has Sylvia instead of me.”

He and cousin Rufus rode up to Knight’s, two miles above, to lodge. And when the sound of the carriage-wheels was out of my ears, then for the first time I drew long, natural breaths, and was myself once more. No one had so much to say and hear then, as I. And dear papa, too, it was such a happy thing to look in his earnest, thoughtful face, lighted up with inward thankfulness, and to hear him tell all that had been done for his soul up there. We all wept; we drew more lovingly together. We talked of Mr. Harson; of what he had been to papa and to us all. Helen Louise was sure she would go on her knees to him and kiss his feet, if his sandals were of cow-hide, and covered with the dust of the furrowed fields. That was such a man as she loved, wherever and in whatever garb she found him. Such a man made her think of the Saviour, and feel as if He were again on the earth. God bless such men! God bless them!

She sat on a footstool at papa’s knees, twisting his fingers in hers, as she talked, and with tears going unheeded down her cheeks.

This conversation did me good. It quieted my mind. I could pray now from the depths of my heart, and feel that my prayer was answered. I could love the Good One, who all day stretched out His hand to me, saying—“Daughter, give Me thy heart.” I could feel that He was great and kind, infinitely above all others; and that He was sufficient for me.

Sylvia and I opened a cot that papa had brought into the parlor for us, and slept there. She took me in her arms, and would have talked with me of Mr. Woodbury.

“How do you like him, Meggy?” she asked.

“Very well. He is a fine looking man. But,

pray, Sylvia, don’t it make you as happy and thankful as a bird, to see this change in papa?”

“Yes; as you wrote, ‘I could have died to bring it about; and it has come without a single sacrifice,’ at least, on my part. With you and dear, good mamma, it has been different. I used to pity you so, when I first went to Roxbury, that I could have no peace; at least, not until I saw how strong and cheerful your letters were. Then how I loved and admired you! ‘There is no sister like my sister!’ I would keep saying in my heart, and with my lips, too; and uncle’s folks and Mr. Woodbury said the same. And now to have you once more in my arms, to come home after being gone so long, and find you all alive and well, and papa so happy, and home so pleasant—I can’t be thankful enough, although God knows that I do thank Him with my whole heart. Only there is one thing, Margaret, dear; it seems to me that something troubles you, or that you are not well, or something.”

“I am worn and tired; it has been so warm in the house to-day. Besides, we sat up almost all night to talk with Garland, night before last. Last night a headache troubled me.”

“And I am keeping you awake all night, to-night. Don’t speak another word, Good night!—my pillow is a little too low. Pleasant dreams!—there, that’s all right. Dream of Mr. Woodbury if you can; for I assure you he is well worth dreaming about. Good-night!”

“Good-night. But I shan’t dream of Mr. Woodbury. I like Mr. Garland better; I dare say he is better worth dreaming about.”

“You do? Ah! I guess you say it to be obstinate. At any rate, tell me in the morning what you dream. Good night—good night! Let me now put one hand on your lips, thus; and another on mine, thus.”

We still laughed, however; and were so long going asleep, that we heard the clock strike two before we could shut our eyes.

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE MAIDEN AND THE HAND-
MAIDEN.

A TALE OF HOME-LIFE IN NEW ENGLAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "SUSY L.—'S DIARY."

[CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 67.]

CHAPTER X.

I know not in what way it was; but in the morning I was strong and cheerful. I could wonder now and laugh at the feelings of the day before, the dread of Mr. Woodbury, the fear of him, as if he were Jupiter, or Neptune, or even Pluto. I could believe now that he was altogether a common sort of man, who could by no means strike me dead, or run off with me to the caves, or leave me dying of jealousy and love if I saw him running off with another, even with my sister Sylvia—only I should almost die of grief at the loss of *her*.

"Margaret," called Mr. Harson, from his carriage, which was at our gate. I was standing at an open window.

"What say, Friend Harson?" replied I, going to the door.

"Come here, if thee will. I want to speak to thee. Thee will wish to send to the office this morning, I heard thee saying, last evening," he added, when I came to the gate.

"Yes, I shall. We were just talking about it."

"I will take thy letters, if thee would like to have me."

"This is very kind, Mr. Harson. Papa was on the point of sending George; but there is so much for him to do here now."

"Yea, yea; we knew how it must be here," gathering up the reins for a start. He looked up to the blue sky, abroad on the glorious landscape, and—"I am glad thy friends have such a good morning for their first, here in this wild land," said he.

"I am. They are delighted with this wild land; and, my good, kind Mr. Harson, they all want to see you. You have done so much for papa! so much. You are always doing something kind for us. I fear this will trouble you that you have undertaken this morning."

"Nay, my good Margaret, not at all. I have other business that takes me nearly there. Come in with thy friends; we shall be glad to see them. Come in, if thee should want anything, help, or anything. Thee shall be as welcome as we ourselves, to whatever we have."

"Thank you," said I, with swimming eyes; for there was even more in the clear, kind face and voice, than in the words.

"I want to see him! I want to speak to him!" said Helen Louise, coming through the yard to us, with a look of mingled earnestness and modesty which it was very pretty and engaging to see.

Mr. Harson heard her, as well as myself, of course. He smiled, and gave her hand a cordial shaking, upon being introduced to her.

"I wanted to speak to you, sir," said Helen Louise, not exactly knowing how to proceed.

"And what did thee wish to say to me, friend

Helen?" asked he, speaking in a lively manner that, at once, put her at ease.

"Why, that I like you the best of any man I have ever heard about," said she, speaking rapidly, and with filling eyes: "I like everybody who is kind. The greatest talent in a man, and wealth and a great name—I never care the snap of my finger for these in a man, if he isn't benevolent and kind; if he isn't doing something for his race; if he hasn't some great—*really* great—and Christ-like idea in his head. Do you, cousin Margaret? Do you, Mr. Harson?"

We both assured her that we did not. Mr. Harson assured her that he liked her quite as well, he would venture to say, as she did him, invited her to call, to "run in any time, and not make a stranger of herself," and then drove on.

Cousin Edith joined us with two sun-bonnets under her arm, putting on her long sleeves and buttoning them up under the little caps, as she came. She was not near so beautiful as Helen Louise, but she had a cordial face for those she loved, and a splendid figure. One does not often see so graceful, so dignified a step as hers; mamma's was like it, when she was not worn with care and hard work. She put one of the bonnets on her own head, and handed me the other.

"Let us walk, Margaret," said she; "let us walk out towards the man of these mountains. I long to come in sight of the human shape he wears."

"I would go, dear Edith, but the morning work—"

"Sylvia and I have just planned it that you are to have very little to do with the morning work, or any other work, while we stay—you have had so few pleasures! Helen, dear child, go in and put the parlor into the best shape that ever parlor wore. I have helped Sylvia almost through with the rest. You will walk, Margaret?"

"Gladly, I only wish all could go."

Helen Louise affected to pout; but she pinned flowers to the dress of each, and then ran back, singing, to the house.

We had walked more than a mile, stopping often to gather the plums that ripened at the wayside, and had just turned to retrace our steps when we heard a carriage; and, looking back, saw that cousin Rufus and Mr. Woodbury were coming. We did not expect them until eleven; for when they left the night before, it was their plan to spend the whole morning in fishing.

"Hallo!" That was a gleeful shout. It was cousin Rufus.

"Just what I wanted!" said Mr. Woodbury, springing to the ground. "How do you both do, this morning? Yes, one sees you are well by your looks. Margaret—Miss Fay—or *may* I call you Margaret?"

"If you wish."

"As I most certainly do. Margaret, I hope you like this day." He was standing before me looking over the wild flowers and plums in my hand.

"Yes, I do!"

"Well, come! come into the carriage. I want to argue with you about yesterday. I believe you called it a wretched day."

"And so it was. I will never give it up."

"We will see. Edith"—extending his hand to help her in. She had accepted it, and was preparing to mount.

"Will you ride, Edith?" said I, quite horrified.

"To be sure she will," replied he, helping her forward.

"There is no room," said I, putting my hands behind me; for he had his already extended, and had, besides, the look that one always feels it vain to oppose with ordinary means.

Rufus seated Edith on his knee, with a face as if it were "not of the least consequence," and laid his hand on the vacant half of the cushion, saying, "Come, Maggie dear, since you must—since we—two of creation's lords—have determined what it is best for you to do."

I sprang into the buggy without giving Mr. Woodbury a chance to help me. I sat down quickly on the seat, and spread my skirts a little, so as to fill it altogether and the front of the carriage, at the same time bidding Mr. Woodbury a good morning, as if we would leave him there. He liked this; and, as for cousin Rufus, he laughed so loud that he awakened the whole Echo family, children and all, and they straightway fell to doing the same—that is, to laughing as merrily as he. But these lords have such dominion over things, we "weaker vessels" inclusive, that it is never easy putting an abiding discomfiture upon them. They can adjust and readjust to suit themselves. For example, Mr. Woodbury came into the carriage, put my skirts aside, and seated himself on his valise at my feet.

"Well, I am determined to quarrel with you, every inch of the way," said I. "Yesterday was a wretched day!"

"Because Edith, and Barton, and I were not here. To-day, you say, is better—is good."

"It was; but this—"

"Oh, I like it," said Edith; "the horse goes like a bird; and how good the air is. Did you go where you could see the Old Man's face?"

The Old Man of the Mountains, by-the-by, was only a few miles above us.

"Oh, no! one must go almost to Gibbs' for that," replied cousin Rufus. "Did you say, Margaret, that Garland and his party will stay, to-day, at the Notch House?"

"That was their plan."

"Woodbury and I couldn't remember just what you said about it. We should have rode up there this morning, if we had been sure of finding him. He's a capital fellow. I want to see him."

Thus it happened, that between Edith and cousin Rufus, the quarrel was taken out of Woodbury's and my hands, and we were riding along as amiable as two robins. He ate nearly all my plums, though.

CHAPTER XI.

But it was not good for me, riding with him, walking with him, being helped by his hand over the walls and brooks, over precipices and from rock to rock—sitting and talking with him in the still twilight, when others were sauntering here and there, else more disposed to reverie than to conversation—listening to him with my eyes on his bent face, while he read aloud to me. I

knew then that it was not good for me, but I could find no way of avoiding it; I tried to. Well as I loved being near him, I tried to avoid him by occupations in the kitchen or garden; but I was driven thence. Sylvia was in the kitchen when there was anything to be done there, to try whether she had forgotten how to make pastry, and gingerbread, and cup-cake. Edith was there learning how to cook trout, or to make a corn-meal pudding, or a farina pudding. Helen Louise was there, too, singing and frolicking, turning all the work into play by her merry ways and words; making pancakes for breakfast, and sandwiches; or seeing to the asparagus, and the cucumbers, and salad, for dinner. Aunt Margaret laid the cloth for our meals, and kept fresh water and flowers in the vases, picked up the withered leaves and flowers, together with the bits of sewing cotton and worsted, from the carpets; and every morning went round with her old gloves on, and with a ragged silk handkerchief, carefully wiping away every particle of dust from the furniture. Mamma, meanwhile, went quite at her leisure here and there, seeing to everything, especially to the bread, the sponge-bread, and the hot barley and buckwheat cakes. Papa, uncle Leonard, and the "boys," as they called Mr. Woodbury and Rufus, worked in the fields and in the garden; brought in fresh vegetables from the garden, berries from the fields, and trout from the streams. Thus the work within the house and without was shared by so many that it was burdensome to no one. On the contrary, it gave us strength, and appetite, and cheerful spirits. We commented on this, as we sat at our meals, and wished that it might always be so with us: that it might be so the whole world over; that each might bear his or her part of the labor, in the great human hive, so that no one need be overburdened with toil, and so that no one need fall into ennui and mental and physical debility for want of it.

Thus the days passed. We wished to go directly to Mount Washington—the weather was so delightful, the air so clear! But we feared that, by going, we would miss seeing Garland on his return. His stay among the mountains must be very short, he said; he would be sure to return by way of Lincoln; and papa and cousin Rufus' plan was to watch the stage-coach for him, and hold him over one stage, if no more. This plan made our parents altogether happy. Sylvia made no remarks upon it—she did not seem dissatisfied about it; but I fancied that something often stuck in her throat. I fancied that she dreaded the meeting a little, because, although Garland had never made a formal declaration of love, she knew very well why he had not—she knew very well his sentiments towards her. I dreaded his detention, and grew quite nervous as the hour for the Friday stage drew near. It came in sight; it was close by; and cousin Rufus was at the road side to stop it. Garland was not there, and I drew a long, free breath.

"Garland? Garland?" a man on the middle of the back seat said, putting his head forward; "has he friends here?"

"Yes; friends good and true," replied cousin Rufus. "Have you seen him up along?"

"No, I hav'nt seen him, but—" The man drew back into his place, and settled down for a start.

"Hav'nt seen him! Have you been at the mountains?"

"I have been at the mountains; but I didn't see him. Will the driver go on?"

The driver went on; and cousin Rufus came slowly to the house, with his eyes on a leaf he had broken on his way through the yard.

"The man says he didn't see him," said he, evidently perplexed. "But I don't believe him: or, at least, I believe he saw him, or heard of him."

"I hope nothing has happened to him," sighed mamma. "He was not cheerful when he was here; and I have felt troubled about him ever since."

"If he don't come to-morrow, we will go up on Monday morning, with my horse and one of Mr. Harson's, and, probably, we can engage two at Knight's. We had better see about it to-night, some of us." Papa, too, was anxious, as I saw by his thoughtful face.

Sylvia's color came and went, as I felt that my own did; but Mrs. Harson happened in just then; and when we told her what troubled us, she said, with a good, cheerful face, "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' my friends. It may be that he is at this time very happy, and well; so, ye had best not let your hearts be troubled."

"Yes, that is true, Mrs. Harson," replied uncle Leonard, with a look as if Faith had come in unseen with Mrs. Harson, and lifted his misgivings, and borne them far away from him.

Faith did something for us all, and soon we were talking with our own wonted cheerfulness. And if the undefined fears came back again to me, there came also the quieting words, "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and my heart was still, and had patience to wait. I think it was the same with all the rest.

Mrs. Harson took us all over to drink tea with them.

"I love to go to friend Harson's—there's an easy spirit there," said a good lady of Lincoln to us one day. She had just been spending a few hours there.

We felt the same, that afternoon; and that it was also a spirit of beauty and of gentle power. Simplicity—the living Truth seemed to be inscribed all through that house—on the snow-white walls, the sanded floors, and especially upon the hearts and the lineaments of the inmates. We felt—as I always did there—how utterly foolish and contemptible a thing is vanity, and how false and artificial a great portion of the life of at least half of these who are on the earth. I saw my own faults, my feverishness, my propensity to be often "careful and troubled about many things," and, with tearful eyes and a lifted heart, I said, "Bring my wandering heart to Thee, thou Great and Holy One!"

We returned home at twilight.

"Let us who are so disposed, take a ramble," said Woodbury, as we were turning up to our house.

I assented with joy, for it was what I was at that moment wishing to do.

Rufus excused himself. He would ride up to Knight's and see about some horses. By the way, he and Mr. Woodbury had lodged at Mr. Harson's since the first night after their arrival. My parents, uncle and aunt, urged their preference for sitting down quietly within doors; and Edith had better do the same, aunt Margaret thought—for she already had a bad cold. Helen Louise *certainly* could not go, she said. She must finish her letter that evening. Sylvia must likewise finish hers to Charlotte, so that hers could go to the post-office with Helen's, and that Charlotte need not write to her at Roxbury. I could see no force in their excuses, and endeavored to obviate them, but in vain. I then proposed to Woodbury deferring our walk until the next evening, when others could be at liberty.

"We will have another to-morrow evening," said he, making his bow to the girls, drawing my hand through his arm, and leading me away.

I was, at first, uneasy and stupid; and I beat about me in vain for something to say that was worth saying. But Mr. Woodbury was at no such loss. He never was. He was never at all garrulous, but quite the reverse. Nevertheless, he had a ready, quiet way of saying quiet things, which made him, as a companion, more agreeable than it had ever entered into my heart to conceive that mortal man could be. He had, beyond this, a power over me, by which he brought me directly into his vein; so that, all along, I should have felt it good being with him, but for the fear that he would at length become so dear to me, that I could not give him up to another without a painful struggle and sacrifice.

We had sauntered a long way, stopping many times to listen to the waterfalls, and to look up into the mountain recesses where the shadows of night were already gathering; almost stopping many times, as, in the earnestness of our conversation, we nearly forgot to move.

"Unsay that old libel against the world, Margaret," said he, on our way home, and taking my hand into his, "acknowledge that it is a good, comfortable world."

Now, if anything on earth could have brought me to the concession he asked, it would have been the friendly glance going down into my heart, the thrilling voice, and the hand taking mine closer to its wide palm.

"Yes, thou good one! better to me than to thee, even, now that I have thee so near me." This is what I thought. But listen to what I said, after taking a moment in which to get a tolerable command of my voice—

"No; I still say the same thing. It is only good and comfortable, sometimes, and for some persons."

"This is what your lips say, because you are a little obstinate," replied he, laughing, and with his glance still on mine. "Your face and your voice are on my side. And, now, Margaret, let your lips concede that it is good and comfortable, this evening, here, where we are. It is so good for me here, and everywhere, where I have you by my side."

He did not see my face, or hear my voice again

in a long time, not until he had said many unexpected things to me, and, among the rest, that I was dearer to him than all the world, inasmuch as the world would be empty and cold without me.

I made no development of the suppositions I had been entertaining so long regarding him and Sylvia; but these circumstances came out in the course of our conversation. He was strongly prepossessed in my favor at the lake. He made some enquiries of Mrs. Olsted; learned, among other things, that I was the niece of his pastor, and, upon returning to Roxbury, made known his impressions to uncle and aunt, the result of which was my invitation to their house. Upon Sylvia's arrival, the whole matter was laid before her; but, for the reason named by Helen Louise in her letter already quoted, it was decided to let things remain as they were, until it was seen what papa's exertions for himself would do, until they should all come North together.

"Now, here I am," said he, in conclusion, "in spite of your obstinacy, loving you more and more every hour. And you love me—this makes me the happiest, luckiest man on earth."

He pressed my hand close, and laid it on his beating heart, as he spoke.

I was too happy, too gratefully agitated, to speak, and we walked on some minutes in silence. We were now almost home. Woodbury aroused himself, and, with a smile and a gentle sigh, said—

"Margaret, isn't it a good, comfortable world for us?"

"Yes, a dear, good world!"

By the way, I brought my moss-vase back to the table, that evening, and filled it with wild roses.

CHAPTER XII.

Now I could let Sylvia talk to me of Woodbury; I could speak freely to her of Garland.

"Poor Garland," said Sylvia, in a voice of infinite pity and tenderness. And I heard her tears dropping on the pillow. "I am so distressed for him, Margaret," added she. "I have been so all day; or ever since the stage came down. I can't shake off the fear that something has happened to him; and the hours are so long—oh, so long; it is so long to Monday." Drop, drop, faster than ever, went the tears, and her breath was hot on my cheek. She did not sleep for the night.

Papa and Mr. Woodbury took a little turn before breakfast, on the following morning, and, on their return, they had a few words with mamma, who was in the garden, looking to the welfare of her celery and other savory herbs; so that, at breakfast time, it was known all through the house that, if it were according to God's good pleasure, Woodbury and I would go through the rest of our life here, side by side.

"I am glad," it was said, now and then; but there were tearful eyes and serious, thoughtful faces on every hand; and every soul there was melted by dear uncle Leonard's prayer for us.

Woodbury sat at my side at table. He did not often speak. When he did, it was with an agitated voice; but his face had quite a glorified

aspect. For myself, I wished not to speak at all; but to be near him, to drink in, now and then, his rich tones, to think of his strong, manly heart, his great kindness, and say to myself—

"And he is mine, and I am his!"

Sylvia's pale face and swelled eyes held my joy in check, and made me often sigh for her, and accuse myself of a most miserable egotism. At length I spoke openly of our fears, of Sylvia and Garland's mutual love. When she heard their words of loving sympathy, of hope, and, indeed, of *belief*, that he was safe, that we would see him there in our midst that day, she wept awhile freely; but she was more at ease afterwards, and waited less nervously the hour for the stage's coming.

She grew pale as death, however, at the first sound of the distant wheels, and appeared as if she were suffocating as they drew near, nearer yet, and stopped at the waving of cousin Rufus' hand.

We saw that Garland was not there; we would have known it by the slow shake of Rufus' head as he looked through the coach, and amongst those that were on the top.

"Driver, do you, or any of your company, hear anything of one Garland, at any of the hotels among the mountains?" asked Rufus, going nearer the coach.

"Garland! Yes; what was it you were telling about a Mr. Garland being lost, up there to Mount Washington?" said the driver, turning round to a gentleman behind him.

"Why, I don't know particulars," replied the man, leaning forward so as to speak to Rufus, "for he put up at Fabyan's, and I was at Crawford's. But I'll tell you what I heard. There were two of the Garlands, I believe, sir?"

"Yes, sir."

"That was what I heard—one from this State, and one from Massachusetts. The way I heard the story was, that the one from Massachusetts wanted to walk up; he thought he should like it better. Well, he kept near the rest—there was a large party, they said—till they got pretty well over Monroe; and then he started on to get at the top before the horses. They said, up there, that he didn't realize anything about what he was undertaking; and it seems he didn't. He got lost. This is all I know about his part; or, only that he found his way to the bridle path, the next morning, and waited there for that day's party to come along—for parties go up every pleasant day, as he knew and calculated on. But, before he was found, the day that he was lost, in fact, they had gone hunting for him. The other Garland couldn't give up when the rest did; he went too far, too long, or something, and he got lost, or fell, as is more likely, and hadn't been found when I came from there, this morning—at least, not unless it was late last night."

"What are they doing?" demanded cousin Rufus. "Are they doing all they can to find him?"

"Yes; his party and Mr. Fabyan sends men; and, yesterday, some others, visitors, went."

"And this is all you know?"

"It is all I know."

"None of the rest of you know anything farther?" stepping back a little, and looking over the whole company.

They all shook their heads.

"I wish we did, something more favorable, if he has friends here," said a white-haired, good-looking old man.

"I wish to Heaven you did," sighed cousin Rufus. He thanked his informant, bowed to them, and returned to us with eager steps.

"Let's go, this hour, this minute, Woodbury," said he. "Isn't this what we had better do?" he added, looking at his father and mine. "You can all come, Monday."

"Yes," cried papa. "It distracts me almost, thinking—Sylvia, my good child, this is hard for you and your father—"

She threw herself into his arms, sobbing convulsively, and, one instant, the tears rolled down papa's cheeks, and fell on her head. But, in a moment, he dashed them away, spoke a few low words in Sylvia's ear, turned her over to mamma's arms, and hurried out to assist them in starting. In less than five minutes, the horse was at the gate, and they were ready to start; Rufus flurried, excited, hardly knowing what he was doing; Woodbury with a serious, but, at the same time, a quiet, hopeful look, that it did us all good to see.

"Don't venture too far," begged I, as he came and took my hand at parting.

"No, my Margaret."

He pressed my hand to his lips, bowed to the rest, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh, the long, long hours!" said Sylvia, bursting into tears, when we were left alone that night. She had not wept before since they left; but she had been so pale, so ill at ease! going almost continually from spot to spot, "seeking rest and finding none!"

She slept soundly, at last; and awoke the next morning, strengthened and calm.

It was a clear, blue, splendid morning. We thought what a good day they would have for their search after the lost one—if it were so that he was not already found—and our hearts were, in a measure, comforted.

"Thy own horse is gone, friend Fay," said Mr. Harson, as he joined us all in the garden. "But if thee or any of thy friends would like to ride down to Woodstock to our Friends' meeting, my double wagon is heartily at your service, and the grey horse. He is strong, and can carry four or five down there without any faltering. We shall take the single wagon."

Uncle, aunt, and the girls, thankfully accepted his offer; but the rest of us preferred to remain at home. We had a secret hope every hour, that the next would bring our friends and Garland with them.

But the day passed, uncle's folks returned, the night closed in, and they had not come; and the next morning we had no spirit for the contemplated ride,—excepting papa and uncle; they were in haste to be gone.

Sylvia could not go; she shook her head mournfully, and grew paler than ever, when it

was mentioned. Mamma could not leave Sylvia; and, besides, she had already been there twice, and was not anxious to go again. Aunt Margaret had been there once. She would be pleased to go again, if all could go, and under propitious circumstances; but, as it was, she would much rather remain with mamma and Sylvia.

"And I would, too," said I, with my arms around Sylvia.

"No, my good Margaret," she said, putting my hair back and kissing my forehead. "I would rather you would go. You may think of something that can be done there." She gasped a little, and then proceeded. "And I long to be almost alone. I long to have it still, my head feels so bad." She pressed her hand on the top of her head, and with such a distressed look, that, for a moment, I was ready to die for her.

Neither would Edith and Helen Louise listen to my plan of remaining at home; and, added to all this, the thought of a very dear friend was drawing me mountain-ward; it was at once settled, therefore, that I should go.

I accompanied papa; Edith and Helen Louise, uncle Leonard.

Another pleasant day, only it was exceedingly dusty; there had been no showers for so long.

We were within a few miles of the mountains; and beside the road was a field, among whose blackened stumps and rocks a man and a bare-headed, white-haired boy were hoeing. Papa stopped his horse to enquire about Garland.

"I ruther guess they han't found 'im yet," said the man, with one hand on his hip, and the other on the top of his hoe-handle. "I ruther think they han't; for 'Nezer, here, was up ter Fab'an's yesterday arternoon—he an' Josh went up ter carry some trouts they'd caught—an' they said they heerd 'em talkin about it; an' they hadn't found 'im, ner wan't like to. Do you amongst you know 'im?"

"Yes, very well. Do you know whether he had provisions with him when he left?"

"No, I han't hearn. Did you hear anything about his havin' victuals with him, when he went, 'Nezer?"

"Yes, he did!" said the boy, blushing, but speaking with earnestness. "They said that he slung on his fishing-bag—you've seen 'em, father, a good many times, on the men when they were down this way arter fish—an' this was chock full o' victuals. They said he wouldn't starve in a number o' days."

"I thank you, my good boy!" said papa, with a hopeful face. "This is the best thing I have heard yet."

"You're very welcome," replied the boy in timid tones, and blushing at papa's praise.

"Is your farm a good one, sir?" asked papa, as he was preparing to start.

"Ruther a tough one ter work, sir; but 'Nezer here and I are strong; we make it turn out a pooty good crop of one thing an' another. We git a good livin' off of it."

"And you manage to take a newspaper or two, I suppose?" said papa, smiling.

"Not yit. This is what 'Nezer and Josh are sellin' the trouts and plums for. Sarah, two year older than 'Nezer here, and Ruth, two year

a'most younger, pick the plums. They want the newspapers, too."

"That's it, sir!" said papa. "You have struck the right track, no doubt. I will tell you, sir, I will make up a great bundle of papers, and send them up to you by the stage. You will find some one amongst them, I think, that you will like to subscribe for. I wish you a good morning, sir."

"Good mornin'; thank you! thank you!"—The man's eyes shone with pleasure, and so did the boy's.

"Now that's a great and a good man," said papa, after riding awhile in thoughtful silence. "I have been thinking of something I saw yesterday in Channing. 'A man is great as a man, be he where or what he may; the grandeur of his nature turns to insignificance all outward distinctions.' I don't remember his words, but their amount is, that if we confine man in dungeons, or chain him to slavish tasks, the light within him will still be burning, will still show him his way, and make it more or less clear and bright to him. I am glad that it is so," papa added, with moistened eyes, "but it makes me pity the poor, and all those who are chained to slavish tasks by the merely physical wants of life. I wish things could be different, especially here in 'the land of the free.' I wish that thousands and millions of acres of the richest lands need not lie a mere waste, while so many stay here in the crowded towns without one inch of God's broad earth, on which they dare to set a foot; nothing but the paved streets. Their souls are so dark, when with the fields about them, and for them, and with easier means of subsistence, they might be so full of God's own light! God help them! God help them, I say! And God help those men who have legislative power, and those who have wealth, and especially those who have great souls, to work for that which is worth working for, for that which will make the poor and the rich better and happier."

"And this," thought I, with a melting heart, "this is the man, who, one year ago, was so selfish, so narrow and so worldly-minded!"

But now we were drawing near Fabyan's; and Garland again took exclusive possession of our thoughts. With what strained eyes and brains we looked along the road before us! and, especially when we came within sight of the house, through the knots, great and small, of gentlemen who stood or sat in the piazza, or sauntered near the hotel! It was near the dinner-hour; those, therefore, who had not gone up the mountains, were all there, waiting the call of the bell.

Seldom is it the fortune of three dusty, way-worn damsels to be set down in such an assemblage of well-dressed, courtly-looking knights; and seldom, I dare say, do they—the way-worn damsels, that is—care so little for the eyes that take in all their appointments, from equipage to gaiters, inclusive. We were all trembling for the first words we would hear.

Fabyan came out immediately. He recognized papa and uncle Leonard, and shook his head slightly, as he gave them a cordial grasp of the hand.

"No Garland yet," said papa.

"I am sorry to say, no. But those friends of yours—this way, this way, if you please, ladies."

"Go directly to your room, girls," said papa, leading us forward toward the stairs. "Almost your dinner-hour; isn't it, Mr. Fabyan?"

"In fifteen minutes."

He rang for a waiter, who, with a portmanteau in each hand, conducted us away; but not until we heard papa say—"The search still goes on!"

"Yes; those friends of yours, and a number besides"—here their voices were lost in the distance.

CHAPTER XIV.

We could not eat—we could find no rest. Papa could find no rest, for the horrible uncertainty. He bore it an hour or two in the best way he could, and then he and uncle left with a guide, although, the most that they could hope to do, was meeting the return party, and thereby having their fears the earlier removed or confirmed.

The day waned—the pleasure party returned; and they had had little pleasure, they said, "for thinking of the lost gentleman. It was so horrible to be lost there in that wild place!"

We could no longer stay within. We took our bonnets and walked out in the direction of the mountains, occasionally sitting down on the road-side to wait their appearance; and when this watching and inaction became intolerable, again going forward.

We saw them at last—a large company; and were so faint that we hurried to the bank beside the road, and sunk down on the turf. Papa—we could distinguish papa's erect figure. Uncle Leonard, also; we could distinguish him by his jet black suit. Then, how we searched among the rest! How tantalising was the distance—the crowd in which they rode—the gathering twilight! But at last I saw Woodbury; and "there's Rufus! there's Rufus!" exclaimed Edith and Helen Louise.

"But Garland! but Garland!" groaned we all three; for now they came near, and we could nowhere see him.

And when they came up to us, and we saw the pale, shocked faces, and felt the trembling hand pressures, but heard not one word, we knew then that there was no hope, and wept without restraint.

Uncle would have comforted us with some words of heavenly wisdom and strength.

"But it is so horrible, papa!" interrupted Helen Louise, almost beside herself.

"And poor Sylvia!" murmured I, and again the tears sped.

"There is One who can take care of her, of him, and of us all, my dear Margaret," replied uncle, his face serious, but beaming with the Christian's hope.

"Yes, yes, that is true," sighed we; and we dried our tears.

The guide who accompanied papa, and uncle Leonard, and Garland's cousin, remained behind. They were to kindle fires, and discharge a rifle at close intervals through the night. In them, lay now, the only hope; and this hope was a faint one, for it was believed that he had missed his footing and fallen from some of the precipices, becoming thereby, at least, unable to proceed.

CHAPTER XV.

"What's that? what's that?" we heard one say, in quick, sharp tones, in the piazza, on the following morning. The windows were open into the front parlor, where we sat waiting the appearance of some of the gentlemen of our party. As yet, we had seen none of them, but we had been only a short time below.

"What is it?" was again asked; and, on looking out, we saw that every eye was turned, with eager interest, along the road towards the mountains.

"A carriage—two horsemen," said one.

"And one on foot," said another.

"Slow as a hearse, step and step, they come." This made our hearts stop beating, and half distracted, we went through the rooms looking after papa, or uncle, or some one of our party; at least, for Fabyan. If we could get in sight of his face, we felt that it would be somewhat better with us. But we could not find him; and ready to faint and die, we tottered back to the parlor, and to the windows, to see if some of our people were not there. Every eye that we could see without, was still strained toward the east. No one spoke, or seemed to breathe now; but we saw many exchanges of doubtful, troubled glances; and Helen Louise sunk down on the carpet at our feet, covered her ears with both hands, and buried her face in our clothes.

"Hurra! hurra! hurra!"

Heaven and earth what a cry was that! It startled us, it thrilled us, and ran along our nerves as if the dead were rising.

"Hurra! hurra! hurra!" — louder and more joyful than before.

"And 'Hurra!' we heard it from afar; it was cousin Rufus' voice.

"Now, if I don't thank God, I *never* did!" said Helen Louise, springing to her feet, and dashing off the tears as fast as they came, while she listened keenly to what was said without, "I *knew* well enough"—and "I said all the time"—we heard; and we saw at a glance that the suspense had terminated rightly; for they spoke eagerly, with glad looks, and moved about, mingling group with group.

"I'm going!" said Helen Louise, making her way out into the piazza. We followed her; every lady in the room followed her; and the gentlemen who had remained near the door made room for us. Yes, there they were—Garland pale, and supported a little on Woodbury's breast, to be sure, while Rufus drove; but looking so thankful, so excited in his happiness. My father and Garland's cousin were on horseback: the guide was on foot. Oh! no one knew what one was about, or cared. No one could possibly know what to say or do, save this: we ladies all laughed and cried together, and in the same breath. Garland did not do much better; and many others had quivering chins, and would assuredly have let some tears fall if they had been women.

"My dear Margaret," said Garland, at length. He could not speak at first. "Edith, Helen Louise—my good ones—"

We were kissing his hands, and leaving the shining tears on them.

"Life is so good to me, this morning, Margaret!" said Garland, as he held my hand in his, and pressed it fervently; and then again the choking voice stopped him.

It may seem of little consequence in this place, but I must say that it was good touching Woodbury's hand again, looking into his clear, happy face, hearing his good voice close to my ear, and knowing that now he was safe.

Cousin Rufus was hurrying and ordering on every hand, in the way of facilitating Garland's descent from the carriage.

Meanwhile, questions poured down upon the vigorous looking guide. "He lost his grip on the rocks," said he, and all gathered about him to listen, except those who were busied with Garland. "And he fell then twenty foot or more. He didn't know any great thing for a spell, as you'd guess fast enough, if I didn't tell you; and when he did come to he was bruised, and e'en a'most broke in one of his hip bones; and couldn't get on much any more'n we could in the same fix. Wall, that night he took a terrible bad cold, and something like the rheumatiz clapped on to him. The next night he took another cold, and the next night another, and that makes three of 'em," holding three fingers up before the face of one who stood near him, smiling at his sententious way of telling a story. "But he kept a rubbin' himself—the best thing he *could* do, you know; and by'n'by he could stir round some and eat some; and so by last night, he'd got, as it turned out, into jest the right spot to see our bonfires and hear our guns; and then he got along a leetle nigher and a leetle nigher, till he got where he could make us hear him. Then don't you guess our idees went up? His cousin was more like a shifless woman for a half a minute or so, than like the real Sampson he had been all along. Wall, we'd a tough pull getting him down, he was so weak and lame, you see. But he bore the gripes and twinges like a Ginerol. Afore we got down, fairly, we met them that went out this morning. The carriage was nigh, they said, and 'twas lucky it was, for the feller was weaker than ever, when he see them. Wan't it lucky, old feller?"—giving his "old feller" a hearty slap on the shoulder, on his way into the house.

Papa was full of his jokes, cousin Rufus of his. At breakfast, Woodbury told a story in his inimitably quiet way, that set people laughing all round the table—all but Garland, who seemed little inclined to merriment, although very happy; and poor Edith, whose cold and cough were so bad that she could only sit by and smile at all the nonsense that was going on.

Garland was unable to travel that day; the rest of us wanted to see Mount Washington; we therefore wrote hurried billets to send home by the morning stage.

"We are all crazy this morning, cousin mine," wrote Helen Louise. "We laugh, we run against each other, and then laugh again. I ran against a bilious, long-faced old bachelor there is here, and he started and said, 'Goodness, Miss!'"

"We all kiss Garland, and he kisses us back again. But do you never mind it, since he is hereby getting his lips into facile practice. He goes limping; yet there never was anybody so

charming as we all find him, because his adventure has made him a sort of Grand Lama for all in the house. Good bye!

"Thy cousin,

"HELEN LOUISE.

"*Post Scriptum.*—Garland is writing to you, but I fancy his note will run mostly on love. Margaret and Edith are writing too; but I doubt if they or he have good sense enough to tell you that we shall all take our flight for your bird-house to-morrow morning; your papa and Garland in your papa's carriage, the rest of us by stage. I hope we of the stage may get there first; I am desirous to see how you like Garland's gait at first sight. Oh, dear! it is cough, cough, almost every minute with poor Edith! She took a new cold, I fear, when we were out watching for Garland. I hope good Mrs. Harson can think of something that will help her.

"Thine."

CHAPTER XVI.

Here are various familiar letters, through which my story shall awhile be carried forward to its close.

[From Helen Louise to Julia Leavitt]

THE BIRD-HOUSE, Lincoln, July 20th

My Dear Friend Julia:—I wish you too had been holding your breath and growing thin these four or five days, because Garland was lost among the mountains. I wish you had been dreaming a-nights as I have, of seeing bears' eyes shining in the darkness of cleft rocks; and of slipping off from precipices, whose feet were so far below, that you could only see how a cavernous sullenness and snakes, and a bleeding body were there together, moving, intermingling, exchanging shapes, so that the bleeding body—occasionally showing Garland's face—was now writhing itself into real serpent coils, and anon was fading away into utter darkness. I wish you had been feeling that the sun had no business to shine, nor the birds to sing, nor the flowers and green trees to hold up their heads and mock you with sights of the brightness, the elasticity you could never more feel—never! Then would I not delight myself and make you feel what an important personage I am in your affairs, by holding you back—as the manner of the legitimate story-tellers is—with episodes, with slow and eccentric approaches, with parentheses a half page in length, with ohs! and ahs! and sundry other contrivances. Yes, indeed! and when I had brought you to a fine fever, there should be a dash an inch long—which, although you would be over it in the twinkling of an eye, you would yet feel to be a mortal hindrance; and then I would say—letting the wind out of my cheeks at the same time—"We've found him! Great joy be to thee and to us!" And then I would leave you as I now do, to get particulars from him, or if you are in haste, from Babcock, to whom he is at this moment writing.

The blessed man grew pale and thin and spiritual like one who is about to die; while he was among the mountains, and Sylvia did the same. Her eyes were such large, splendid ones,

when we returned! but then so glad! for Garland, who was at the bird-house before us, leaned on her, and looked in her face, even when he spoke to another.

I do honestly think, my friend Julia, that it must be a delightful thing having a lover, who is, at the same time, a glorious fellow; a fellow whose steps your glance can follow in pride, whose good eyes look out for your comfort, and whose strong hand is always ready to help you; a fellow, in short, like Garland; or, better still, like Luther Woodbury. For, although Garland may be the hero, just now, and although he is a good and an agreeable fellow at any time, and will make cousin Sylvia one of the best of husbands, Woodbury is my prince, of all the men on the earth; and, most beautiful of all, he is as meek, unconscious of his great excellences, as quiet as if every one, the poorest, the most ignorant, were of as much worth as he. I know he has this feeling, and that he acts on it continually. And I imagine, friend Julia, that is not far from being the right and true feeling. I imagine that one immortal soul which God has made is about as dear to Him as another, how much soever their various physical and social conditions may make them to differ externally.

I look at Margaret, and wonder that she moves so quietly; that she is not sometimes a little distraught in consideration of the fine eyes that turn to her, with an expression it is so good to her to see, when she speaks, when he speaks, or when anything goes on; and especially in consideration of her prospective high fortune and great happiness as his wife. I wonder that she knows her head from her feet, and that she attends to us all as she does. But it is like her. It is like him; for he does the same.

Well, heigho! In view of all these things, as they say in the pulpit, I have determined that, when I have a lover, he shall be just as excellent and noble, just as deferential to me, and, at the same time, just as thoughtful for others, as Woodbury is. I will be just as dignified and pleasant, as cordial to him and everybody, as Margaret is. She and I will now and then come together as they do, and touch fingers over a book or a flower; sometimes the fingers shall lock as theirs do; and the glances linger in their meeting, even if no book or flower is about, to account for the proximity; but, for the most part, we will each go our own way, until the words are spoken that make us—one.

We shall all start for home Monday morning, except Garland—who will not be quite well enough, probably, to travel so far, and so much of the way, too, in a crowded, jostling stage-coach—and my brother Rufus, who will wait to accompany him, and stop with him at Piscataquog. Of course you know nothing about this plan. Of course it is nothing to you: you won't see anything of him at your house. No, indeed; I want to stop, too, but he don't hear me, when I suggest this want. I see that he means to have you all to himself. But we shall not complain; for, in making you his, he will also make you ours. Thanks for this! you are so sweet! and we already love you so much!

Send me something, if it be only a piece of

bread and cheese, by Rufus. Send me a letter soon; and believe me

— Now and forever, thine,
HELEN LOUISE.

[From Babcock to Sylvia.]

PISCATAQUOG, September 10, 18—.

Friend Sylvia:—I don't know how to write to you, I have been such a dog in so many things. But I can write the easier, for you forgave me and were my friend, when you had reason to suppose me to be a meaner man than I really was. For instance, you probably thought I wanted our marriage put off almost wholly, if not quite wholly, because of your father's difficulties; making some allowance, perhaps, for my excuse of the bad times that crippled me. But it must have looked to you, on the whole, as if I turned off from you, because your father was so deep in the mire just then. But it wasn't that; for, didn't I know all about these things, when I first spoke of marriage to you? Certainly I did.

What was it then? you will say.

I will tell you in my own, plain way. I loved Charlotte Stone before I ever knew much about you, or thought of looking up to one so much above me in agreeableness, and every such thing. And she knew that I loved her, or guessed that I did; and, for some reason or other, I don't know what, nor does she, as I guess. She liked me, and was pleased to see me at her father's, and to receive the little attentions I paid her. She expected, and had reason to, that I would soon offer myself to her in words.

Have you seen a little piece of poetry, going round in the papers, one verse of which runs like this:—

"Though ye never said a word, John,
My trusting heart to win;
Ye hae leed before the Lord, John,
An' that is deeper sin;
An' your step leed coming here, John,
Sae aft in cauld an' rain,
For mony a happy year, John,
Whose memory is pain."

Well, I came across this sometime after I proposed marriage to you. I couldn't help reading it over and over again, till, by-and-by, it was running through my mind all the time, and Charlotte with it, and I could see then that I liked her as well as ever; and that I had left her, thinking that I could carry my affections wherever my feet went, and that, of course, I could soon love you better than I did Charlotte, because you were her superior in many things, and would make a more graceful mistress for my new house.

One thing that I missed most in Charlotte was independence of manner in her intercourse with me. She thought too much of me, this was the trouble, and not enough of herself; for, although I am of an arbitrary turn, perhaps because I am of this turn, I like people best when they have a pretty smart will and way of their own, and stick to it in spite of me. I missed this in Charlotte. And then, when you and I were engaged, what trouble I had—for I missed it in you.

When Charlotte came back, she suited me exactly. She was a thousand times more delicate and graceful, than before she went, some

way; and, besides, she held her head up and spurned me—a thing I worshipped in her.

Well, Sylvia, I couldn't marry you, feeling as I did. I didn't know as Charlotte would ever again give me a civil word, and so I made a false excuse to you: told lies to you, as I know many men in my place are accustomed to do, when the plain truth would not only be more manly, but more profitable every way. Now, in this case, I believe Charlotte could overlook the rest, and be my wife, if it were not for that foolish piece of business, my false excuses, and I don't blame her for despising me for it—I hate myself as if I were a toad. But I have worthy determinations for the future: that is, I am determined to speak and act the living truth, let what will come. And, Sylvia, I must have Charlotte, or never be really contented and at my ease. This is why I write to you; I know you are friendly to me, and that you will believe all I have said in this letter, little as my past conduct makes me deserve it. You are Charlotte's friend. There is no one she values so much, or who would be so likely to influence her in my favor as yourself. Will you write to her? I will not ask you to say this or that: say what you think best, and I have the confidence that it will help my cause.

God bless you, Sylvia. Whether you help me or not, I shall always admire and respect you above all others, save one.

I have heard Garland's happiness from his own lips. He is worthy of you in education and every respect, as I feel I never was and never could have been. You, Sylvia, will be happy, however it may be with

Your friend and servant,

GEORGE BABCOCK.

P. S.—I am without excuse, neglecting to mention your excellent parents and your excellent sister, down to this postscript. Assure them of my increasing respect and affection, and of the satisfaction with which I, in common with all others, look forward to the time when we shall see you and them here amongst us again. I did not know, until I was informed of it by Mr. Stone, last evening, that it was Margaret's intended, Mr. Woodbury, that bought your father's property. I have always supposed, before, that Mr. Olsted bought for himself. Tell Margaret that Esquire Wilson and I have been talking this matter over to-day. We came to the conclusion that we have acted the part of two fools. The old 'squire looks rather blue, and shakes his head at all advices to marry. Margaret must cheer him up when she comes.

Don't laugh at this postscript—at its length, I mean.

G. B.

[Letter from Charlotte Stone to Sylvia Fay.]

PISCATAQUOG, September 20, 18—

My Dear—Yours of the 13th came last evening. Babcock brought it from the office, and sat at my feet with one of my hands in his, or at his lips, or his heart, while I was reading it. He sighed; I believe he was not very far from weeping. I pitied him, as I have this long while; but I no longer tormented him as for a long while I have done. Your letter seconded the requisitions of my own conscience and judg-

ment, and especially of my love for him; and before I was half through with it, I bent over him and left a kiss of peace and love on his forehead. He rose, then, and took me in his arms and wept over me like a woman. I was for a while no calmer than he; for I have suffered so much, dear Sylvia; and then I could believe that it was over. I know he is not a perfect man, by any means. I know just how I will have to manage him and tyrannize over him, at times, to keep it in his mind that I am precious to him; but he is the man that I love, the *only* man I have ever seen that I could love in the right way to marry. It will suit me to tyrannize—in my way, you know how that is—just as it will suit him to be tyrannized over; and thus it is seen that we were “made for each other.”

I can hear the hammers of the workmen on his house, this morning. Not a stroke has been given to it before since you left. He comes this way with quick steps, and with a look of goodness and comfort on his face, such as I have not seen there before—ever.

He has gone. He came to take me to ride. But see how it went between us.

“Let me carry you to ride this morning,” said he, standing before me, and with a hand of mine in each of his.

Now, thought I, he will swallow me whole straightway, and that will be the end of me, if I will allow it. But this I will be watchful not to do. I will deal out tiny bits to him; will often send him away without a morsel, that he gets no surfeits, that his appetite be kept in a condition of keenness and refinement; and above all, that he may not lose his relish for me until his or my dying day.

“I can’t possibly go this morning, I have so much to do.”

“What have you to do that can be so pleasant as riding this fine morning?”

“I am writing to Sylvia.”

“Oh, well, finish your letter afterwards,” tugging at my hands.

“No. I will go to-morrow morning if nothing comes to hinder me; but this morning I must be busy.”

“As I ought to be, I confess. I left a shop full of customers.”

“That was naughty. You must go back and attend to them. Barber is slower than any snail.”

“I know it. But you will ride to-morrow morning?”

“Yes, if you will come an hour earlier.”

“Yes. And now give me one kiss, and I will go.”

“No.”

“Yes, yes; and it will make me happy all day thinking of it. Give me one, or I will give you twenty.”

“That would be horrid. Takes this then and go.”

“Thanks, dearest, best! darling of my heart and life!”

The good soul held me to his heart an instant, and was gone.

We shall not be married until you are all back here in the dear old house, which has a lonely

look, as if it were conscious of waiting for you. I could not be married without you. Babcock also is willing to wait, “since it is to be soon,” he says.

I know I shall kiss your father ten times right off; tell him so. I never did long to see anybody as I do to see you all. And I am not the only one. My father has no calmness at all, especially when he prays for the dear friends who are absent, and gives thanks to God that He has kept them as it were “in the hollow of His hand.” My good, careful mother has fewer words; but her head is full of plans for filling your pantry beforehand, and I know not what else. I do not go anywhere that eager, glad faces do not appear, questioning me about your coming. If it were possible for us busy, straightforward New Englanders to have more than three holidays in one year—Thanksgiving, Christmas and New-Year—one would be brought about here when you come. As it is, I suppose everybody will think that “the work must go on.” And so it must; for Mother Earth shows but a hard, albeit, a beloved face, to our portion of her large family; and we are not the ones to dance and sing if wants are about us.

Love to the beloved of your household. My parents send love. I know not how many others have given me messages of love for you all. But this I know: I am and always will be,

Your affectionate, CHARLOTTE.

CHAPTER XVII.

PISCATAQUOG, June 12, 18—.

We left our dear bird-house on the first wintry day, when the leaves were black on the garden plants, and when they fell in showers from trees and vines. The winds moaned and sighed, the black clouds lay on the sides of the mountains and snow on the tops. We could hardly wish to stay there through the long bleak time that was coming; but we wept to leave the spot where we had known so many busy, happy days; and above all, we wept to leave our neighbors, the Harsons. Poor papa could not speak when the time came to enter the stage. He could just wring Mr. Harson’s hand; if he had spoken one word the tears would have been unloosed. For no mortal man can he and we all ever feel as we do for Mr. Harson. He is the best man I ever saw. But he is not very strong and well; and we have said many times that he is not for this lower world, that he will not long be here; and this feeling made it the harder for us to look and speak our last. But he promises to come to us; he promises to come with his wife and daughter next week; for then will Sylvia’s and my marriage be.

Uncle Leonard’s family will come—all but dear, noble cousin Edith. She is numbered with the dead; she has been with the dead two months; and, wrote cousin Helen Louise, in a letter that came this morning, “the wound is as deep as it was the bitter, bitter day on which she died. It is deeper, for every day, every turn I take, every little pleasure, and especially every little trial that I must meet now without her sweet company and sympathy, only impresses it upon me more and more what I have lost; what a solitary sick one I must always feel at every thought of her.”

We will go to your marriage, dear Margaret,

dear Sylvia; but with fast falling tears I say it. With tears shall I make the journey over the road that less than a year ago we passed, oh, so happy and full of life! Sylvia, how long we looked forward to that journey. How we laughed and sang and ran over the stairs as we made our preparations! As we rode, the many colored birds, the green earth, the clear sunshine were all for us! God had given them to us, and we were so happy in them! She was so happy! God knew better than we any of us did then, what reason we had to be happy, since the shadow of Death had never once fallen on our way.

Well, the dear girl is *supremely* happy now. She is where she longed to be for days before the summons came.

"Dear ones!" said she one day, "dear ones!—I shall soon go; and precious as you all are to me, good and quiet as my life has been here with you, to go and be with Christ is far better—far better!" And her eyes kindled like a seraph's. They kindled as she died. The light of another world than this was in them; the songs of the Redeemed were already on her lips. This is the only thing that can comfort me at all for her loss, her dying such a triumphant death.

We can go to you the more readily, because you, dear Margaret, will return with us, and because after this we can have you near us as long as we live, I hope. You can't know how thankful we are that you are coming; for, since Edith died, we look this way and that way for something that shall help fill the desolate places in our hearts. No other one can do so much as you; you were so dear to her; you are so dear to us!

Your new house is very beautiful, dearest, and fitted up in a beautiful way. Mamma helped him about the furniture; I about the garden. I know your tastes, and we have tried to have everything in a way that will give you pleasure. There are a great many perennial plants already in bloom; new ones are opening every day, so that a multitude of flowers will lift welcoming eyes to you when you come. I can see him, Margaret; your spouse elect is among them now; they are his "early visitation and his last." I can well conceive what comfort is reserved for you in that spot; and I—I foresee that often when I spy you through the trees, I shall run over and be awhile with you there.

My parents and Rufus send thanks for your kind invitation and loving greetings.

I send the same, and am, while I live,

Yours, most affectionately,

HELEN LOUISE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A few last words from the beloved old home. Regenerate and happy papa walks slowly through the yard with Mr. Harson at his side. They pluck leaves from the shrubbery and tear them as they go along the path. They talk earnestly; and through the open windows I hear papa say—

"That is true, Mr. Harson! We may have had ever so much sin and pain and trouble in our life; but it is never wise to look back and stop to brood over it. For Hope goes before us all, like the morning star, and it is best to be following her, always with courageous and diligent lives."

Dear mamma too believes in Hope and in the morning star; but she has tears coming up to struggle with every smile. She will have Sylvia still by her side. Her thought then is chiefly for me; that nothing tire me; that no draught of the evening air fall on me; that no weeping be done before me; yet I know that the weeping goes on in the still nights; and that, in poor mamma's heart it constantly goes on. She moves here and there. She sees to everything; and to every one that comes to say good-by to me; but her eyes turn every moment to me, with the expression we never see save in the eye of the mother—and of the rarely found one, who, although she is not a mother, can and does out of her abundant sympathies, love like her. Mrs. Stone and Mrs. Harson see to her; the latter that words of Heavenly strength are spoken to her now and then; the former that she does not work too hard and have too much care; that when she knows nothing about it, pies and loaves of cake beautifully made, beautifully ornamented, come to our pantry-shelves; and that Charlotte, leaving the contented Babcock to shift for himself in the best way he is able, is almost constantly going and coming, doing the things that no one else could possibly do as well.

Garland comes! He gives papa and Mr. Harson's hand a passing grasp on his way to the garden where Sylvia and Hetty Harson are cutting flowers for the wreaths and vases Hetty and Charlotte will make up early in the morning.

Soon he will come; and with him uncle Leonard's family.

LATER.

It has been still since they came. It has been something with us all, as if the dear Edith were sleeping in our midst. We have shed a great many tears. I still weep as I write—it is such a loss for her parents, for Helen Louise, and for all of us, who loved her! But the grief for her made it the dearer, being taken to the faithful heart, where henceforth is to be my rest, "in sorrow and in joy."